"THIS HUMDRUM LIFE."
BY HELEN B.THORNTON.
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"THIS HUMDRUM LIFE."

BY HELEN B. THORNTON.

"I AM so tired of this humdrum life," said pretty Ellen Wentworth. "Every day the same dull round! I wish something would happen: I don't care what; if it would only bring a little excitement."

"My child!" said her mother, in a tone of mild reproof. "How can you talk so?"

"How can I?" replied the daughter. "Because I think it's very hard on me, having to slave, in this way, at house-work, and never, or rarely, get any new dresses; while Helen Somers, who's no better than I am, and not so good-looking, has dresses from New York, and doesn't have to work her fingers off. What have I done to have so different a life. It's all because her father happens to be rich. I don't see why I was born, if I have to go drudging, in this way, day in and day out."

"I am really shocked, Ellen, to hear you talk so," said her mother, now speaking severely. "I've no doubt, if we knew everything, we'd find out that Helen Somers has her troubles as well as the rest of us. Probably, just like you, she envies some one richer than herself. Perhaps she is discontented because she can't live in Paris. Everything, my dear, in life is relative. Content comes from a rightly disciplined mind, and has very little, indeed, to do with the mere accidents of fortune."

"Oh! but it's different. Helen Somers don't have to sprinkle and fold clothes, and mend stockings, and make shirts for her father. I don't believe there was anybody ever had to drudge as I do."

Her mother sighed, and was silent for a moment. Then she resumed,

"Ellen, don't you think your father, whose shirts, it seems, you rebel against, has to drudge also? He is not a clerk from choice, I assure you; and at his time of life! But he was ruined, years ago, by a friend; lost all he had; and has never since been able to save enough money to go into business on his own account again. Yet he toils on, without a complaint, and at work that is particularly distasteful to him. How often he comes home at night, utterly fagged out! He has been drudging, too, in this way, for twenty years. Many a time, to my knowledge, he has sacrificed his own comforts, in order that you might have a new dress. Believe me, my dear, there are worse troubles than wanting new dresses, or having to drudge, as you call it."

The tears sprung to Ellen's eyes. She was not really a bad daughter. She sincerely loved her father. But she was young, and her somewhat uneventful existence often fretted her, as it did to-day.

What answer she would have made we cannot say, for at that instant there was a loud, hurried knock at the door. There was something in the knock that made mother and daughter look at each other with white faces; and then both started simultaneously for the front entrance.

They shrank back at the scared face that met them. It was that of a son of Mr. Wentworth's employer, a young gentleman they knew but slightly. His very presence there foreboded disaster, and he looked as if he had some terrible message to deliver. He began to speak stammeringly, but before he had uttered more than a word or two, the hushed, monotonous tread of men, as if bearing a heavy burden slowly and carefully, smote on the ear. With a shriek, the wife and mother would have rushed past him, but he caught her by the arm, and said, hurriedly,

"It is not as bad as you think. Mr. Wentworth is only hurt. He fell down the hatchway. He is not even insensible. Let us hope for the best."

But Mrs. Wentworth was not to be kept back. She broke from his grasp, rushed down the

steps, and, in another moment, was by her husband's side. Ellen made an effort to follow her, but suddenly everything seemed to swim about her. Instinctively she stretched out her hands. The next moment she would have fallen to the ground, if young Mr. Ewing had not caught her just in time.

The weeks that followed were anxious ones. For many days Mr. Wentworth's death was daily expected. The physicians feared some inward hurt, and hesitated to hold out even the slightest hope. But fortunately their prognostications proved incorrect. Mr. Wentworth's leg was broken; but that was all; and after a week, the danger was past.

But what a week it had been for Ellen! There was not an hour in which she did not reproach herself for what she now called "her wicked words." Half the night she lay weeping. Often she was on her knees, in the privacy of her chamber, praying, with sobs and broken articulation, for her father's life. "Spare him to us, oh, God!" she cried, "spare him: let him not die for my fault." It was like the wail of a broken heart. Her heart would have broken if her father had died.

She realized now the truth of what her mother had said, that "there were worse evils in life than having to drudge." She wrung her hands as she thought of it. "Oh! I would drudge forever," she cried, "and be thankful, if only father could get well." When the physicians said, at last, that there was no serious internal injury, and that Mr. Wentworth, with good nursing, would recover, she flew to her room, and on her knees, poured out her thanks again and again.

We might finish our story here. The moral is told. But sometimes, out of the deepest sorrow, there blooms, as if to teach a profound lesson, unexpected happiness. It was so in this case. Young Mr. Ewing saw much of Ellen during her father's illness. He called daily to inquire after Mr. Wentworth's condition, and as Mrs. Wentworth herself rarely left the sick chamber, it was Ellen that generally came down to him. Subdued, and softened by distress, she had never appeared to better advantage: indeed, she had never been as worthy as now; and the influence remained through life. A mutual attachment sprung up between the two. There was nothing to delay the marriage; and the first day that Mr. Wentworth went out, was when his daughter was united, in church, to the husband of her choice.

Mr. Wentworth is now a partner in the house of Ewing, Son & Co. Young Mrs. Ewing lives in elegant style. She has everything, so far as fortune goes, that she can reasonably desire. But she finds that life still has its troubles. Happily she learned the valuable lesson, that a cheerful, contented spirit can discharge its duties, however monotonous, without ever finding them tiresome.

JANET'S NEW-YEAR.
BY THE AUTHOR OF "MISS DERWENT'S DIAMONDS," ETC., ETC.
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JANET'S NEW-YEAR.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MISS DERWENT'S DIAMONDS," ETC., ETC.

JANET ARBUTHNOT put by the little frock she had been striving so hard to finish.

"It is almost dark," she said, glancing toward the window with a little, shuddering sigh. "I suppose I shall have to go, mother."

"I suppose so, dear," replied the invalid, raising herself to a sitting posture; "but they might have spared you to me to-night."

"Yes, mother; but Mrs. Draper thought they would never get on with the dresses for the tableaux without my help."

"And my new frock, Janet," piped a curly-headed little thing from the corner, "who will finish that?"

"Never fear, Alice," replied the sister, pleasantly. "I shall be at home bright and early to-morrow, and you shall have it in good time."

"But what's the use," continued the child, petulantly. "I might as well have no new frock, I've no place to go to; and we shan't have even a doughnut for New-Year—shall we, mother?"

The mother sighed, and fell back upon her pillow, pressing her thin hands to her face to hide the tears she could not keep back.

Janet stood, for a moment, with her hand on the door-knob; then she re-crossed the room to her mother's bed.

"Don't fret, mother," she said, tenderly, kissing the wan and sunken cheeks. "Keep a brave heart, and the sun will shine again some day, despite all this darkness. I think," she added, adjusting her worn shawl, "that I'll come home to-night, if it isn't too late, after the party; and I'll ask Mrs. Draper for part of my monthly pay. You shall have a New-Year's yet, Alice."

She kissed them both, and left, closing the door softly behind her. But instead of going directly to the street, she went into her bedroom. Taking a key from her pocket, she unlocked a small, rose-wood case that stood upon the table, and drew forth a tiny, ebony casket. Her hands trembled nervously as she unclasped it, and lifted a string of emeralds it contained. Rare and brilliant gems they were, most daintily set, and looking strangely out of place in that humble, little chamber. Janet held them tenderly, pressing them caressingly to her lips, and letting them slip through her fingers like a stream of living light. There was a spray of heliotrope in the bottom of the casket, and its sweet, subtle odor filled the little chamber like the breath of incense; and with that strange power which odors alone possess, carried the heart of the sad-faced governess away back to the dewy dawn of her girlhood.

Only five years ago, and this self-same Janet had been the daughter of a wealthy and indulgent father, with every comfort and luxury at her command, and crowds of suitors at her feet. But only one of all these met with any favor from the shy, little beauty; and he was in every respect worthy of her. On the eve of a voyage to Calcutta, he had made his declaration, and been accepted; and the string of emeralds had been his betrothal-gift.

For months after his departure, Janet lived in a dream of bliss, and then the great trouble of her life came. Her father, who held a high position in the mercantile world, failed utterly, and finding himself a beggar, died of a broken heart. Then their beautiful dwelling, and everything went, and his poor wife sank into despairing helplessness; and there was no one left to breast the bitter, bitter storm but pretty, little Janet.

Bravely enough she did it, for the girl was a hero, despite her slender form and lily face. She removed her invalid mother and little sister to a city far distant from the scene of their recent troubles, procured humble lodgings, and then cast about her for employment.

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With much difficulty, she obtained a situation as governess, a position for which her fine education and natural abilities rendered her eminently qualified. Thus the years wore on, Janet hearing nothing from her lover. He was, probably, dead, she thought; or he might have heard of her father's failure, and resolved to quietly ignore her. She did not know, and she was too proud to inquire.

Now, standing there in the gathering gloom, with the rush and roar of the great city in her ears, she asked herself, "Why not sell the emeralds?" They would bring a good price, enough to make her poor mother and little Alice comfortable through many a dreary month. And yet she could hardly bring herself to part from them. They were the one link that bound her to the happy past. The shadows thickened round her, and the dreamy odor of the heliotrope wrapt her, like a trance, in memories of the long-ago. She could see the green, summer-garden, hear the plash of the fountain, and catch the twitter of the canaries from their gilded cages. His face was bending over her, his kisses burned upon her brow, his very words seemed sounding in her ear again. "A quaint affair for a betrothal-gift, darling," he said, "but they are very precious, and they were my mother's wedding jewels. I hold them dearer than anything else I possess, hence I give them to you."

Could she part from them? Sell them for a few paltry shillings? Her bosom rose and fell with great throbs of agony. She could not! She was coiling them into the case again, when her mother's hollow cough broke on her ear.

"For her sake," she murmured, her face whitening in the gloom. "Yes, God help me, for her sake I must!"

She closed the casket resolutely, and slipping it in her pocket, hurried out into the darkening streets. Only a block or two from Mrs. Draper's was a fashionable jewelry establishment, every window a blaze of light. With her heart in her mouth Janet entered, and glanced down the long line of gayly-dressed customers. It would be half an hour at least, she saw, before she could be waited on, and that would be too late. And after all, perhaps, Mrs. Draper might let her have part of her monthly pay, and she would not be forced to sell the emeralds just yet. Glad of any pretext or excuse for keeping her precious gems, she hurried from the shop; but thoughts of her mother and poor, disappointed little Alice brought the blinding tears to her eyes. Life was very desolate. Alas! what would the New-Year bring to her? She ran along briskly, with a dreadful aching at her heart, till she reached the stylish residence of her employer.

"Oh, Miss Arbuthnot! here you are," cried Mrs. Draper, as Janet tapped at the door of the dressing-room. "Come in, we're in dreadful need of help. Agnes is in despair; no one can do her hair to suit her; will you have the goodness to try?"

Janet laid aside her wraps, and approaching the superb beauty, who sat in an arm-chair opposite the mirror, magnificently attired in gold-colored silk, began the task of arranging the lustrous, raven hair.

"And now," asked Janet, when her task was done, and every braid was perfect, "what ornaments shall you wear?"

"Emeralds, of course. Green and gold are his favorite colors, you know, mother," replied Agnes, smiling and blushing. "There is the jewel-case, Miss Arbuthnot."

Janet opened it, and clasped the glittering gems on neck and wrists, and hung the gleaming pendants from the beauty's ears.

"And what for your hair?" she asked.

"Who knows?" replied the beauty, discontentedly. "Flowers, I suppose. If only I had emeralds to match my necklace. Pshaw!" she continued, as Janet held a wreath of rose-buds against her jetty braids, "take them away. They spoil everything else. Nothing but emeralds will do."

"Won't your pearls answer?" suggested her mother.

"Pearls mixed with emeralds! You would make a fright of me, mamma. Oh, dear! I shall have to take off the dress, and wear something else."

Janet hesitated a moment, and then drew the little casket from her pocket.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Draper," she said, timidly, flashing open the case; "but if these would suit, I should be so pleased."

"Why, Janet," cried the heiress, lifting the glittering string from the case, "are you another Cinderella? But where," she added, in surprise, "did you get these costly gems?"

"They were the gift of a dear friend," replied Janet, quietly. "I meant to sell them this evening, but my heart failed me."

"Why, I'll buy them, if they are for sale," kindly said the heiress. "Oh, mother, do look here! Was ever anything so magnificent?" she cried, excitedly, twining the gorgeous string round her raven braids. "May I wear them to-night, Janet?"

"In welcome," said Janet.

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"Well, well," continued Agnes, with a sigh of satisfaction, "there never was such a god-send; my dress is perfect now. I shall not forget your kindness, Miss Arbuthnot."

And she swept down to the parlors, the emeralds encircling her brow like an aureola of light. Janet looked after her with an odd sensation of mingled pain and pleasure, and half regretted the impulsive generosity, that had prompted her to proffer her precious emeralds, even for so short a time.

The tableaux were over, and the waltzing had begun. Mr. Willoughby, the lion of the season, who had just come from Calcutta, a millionaire, approached to seek Miss Draper for his first partner.

"You have surpassed yourself, to-night, Miss Agnes," he said, his eyes full of admiration, as they rested on her queenly face.

Agnes flushed with pleasure. The music struck up, and he turned to lead her off, but suddenly stopped, staring like one petrified.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed, at last, "they are the same! Miss Draper, excuse me! But I cannot be mistaken: where did you get those emeralds?"

Agnes grew scarlet to her very finger-tips, and drew back haughtily.

"A strange question, Mr. Willoughby," she said.

"I know, Miss Draper; and I beg pardon for my rudeness; but those gems were my gift to the dearest friend I ever had. You can understand my solicitude to know how they came into your possession."

"They are not mine, Mr. Willoughby," was the surprised answer; "they belong to my mother's governess."

"And her name?" he said, breathlessly

"Janet Arbuthnot."

Mr. Willoughby's travel-bronzed face grew absolutely radiant.

"One other favor, Miss Agnes," he said. "Can I see your mother's governess?"

For an instant Agnes struggled with wounded vanity and self-love, and then said, frankly, her better nature triumphing,

"I see, Mr. Willoughby, that there is a grand denouement at hand, the finale for our tableaux. Come with me."

He followed her from the parlors, and into a little ante-room, where the young governess sat. One glance at the quiet figure in its robe of brown; at the pallid, sorrow-worn face; and Eustace Willoughby rushed forward with outstretched arms.

"Janet! Janet!" he cried, "have I found *you* at last?"

Agnes disengaged the emeralds from her hair, and dropping them softly into Janet's lap, left the room, blinded by really genuine tears.

"It is quite as well as if I had won him myself," she said.

"Why did you leave our dear old city?" said Eustace Willoughby, when he and Janet were alone together. "I can understand something of your reasons, of course: you shrank from old associations; but it has led to this apparent desertion on my part. I had to go up the country from Calcutta, on important business, fell sick, and was detained for months. When I returned to America, all trace of you was lost. I have been in search of you for months. But now we will never part again."

So, after all, gladness and rejoicing came to Janet, and to the friends she loved, with the dawning of that happy New-Year.

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THE SECRET AT BARTRAM'S HOLME.: CHAPTER I.
BY JANE G. AUSTIN.
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THE SECRET AT BARTRAM'S HOLME.

BY JANE G. AUSTIN.

CHAPTER I.

"If Walton only would be more punctual," remarked aunt Matilda, with a sigh, as the dinner-bell rang for the second time with all the vehemence of an injured cook's indignation vibrating through its tones; and, traveling once more from her sewing-chair to the front window, aunt Matilda looked earnestly down the street and saw Walton coming. Her face cleared in a moment, and ejaculating,

"Dear, handsome fellow!" she stood watching, with all a woman's fond admiration, the stalwart young Saxon who came striding down the street, carrying his blonde head with such stately pride, and yet glancing so good-humoredly to right and left out of the bright, blue eyes, equally capable of expressing warmest love or keenest anger. Seeing his aunt at the window, Walton smiled, showing the magnificent teeth which belonged to his splendid physique, touched his hat, and came bounding up the steps.

"Ten minutes to wash my hands, aunt Matty, and I will join you at the table," cried he, opening the door a moment late; and Miss Matilda went meekly down stairs, deprecating Katy's silent wrath with the announcement that "Mr. Percival would be ready in one moment," and she might put dinner upon the table.

For in this modest little home one Katy performed all the service, and the dinner of two courses waj principally put upon the table at once.

Miss Percival's "one minute" had barely added itself to her nephew's ten, when that young gentleman appeared, fresh and ruddy from his hurried ablutions, and with an air of preoccupation at once apparent to the anxious eyes of the woman, who loved him as she had never loved any other human being.

"What has happened, Walton?" asked she, the moment they were alone.

"Dear aunt! Let me eat my dinner, please, before you begin to unreel the long yarn, I have to spin," pleaded Walton, with the first mouthful of mutton upon his fork. Miss Matilda smiled.

"Then there is a yarn? Well, having justified my own suspicions, or rather penetration, I will be patient."

"And I will be rapid," conceded Walton, already through the first slice of mutton. His aunt held up a warning hand, her knife in it.

"Don't you do it, Walton! Dyspepsia, my dear boy, dyspepsia! I had rather wait a week."

"Don't mention it, aunt! By the end of the second day I should no longer have an aunt—and what should I do then?"

"Get a wife, Walton, as you will some day, at any rate."

"No! No wife for me, aunty; I like you better."

"Nonsense, child!" But Miss Matilda looked pleased, for all that, and considerately began a long account of some domestic event which occupied the whole remaining dinner-hour.

"Now, then, aunty—Katy, take coffee up into the library in half an hour," said Mr. Walton Percival, rising, and opening the door for his aunt, who timidly glanced at Katy, knowing that she much preferred serving coffee upon the dinner-table, and "having done with it," as she said. But Walton Percival was one of the men who take their own way in their own houses, as a matter of course, and do it so good-naturedly, that the most savage of Katys will generally concede it without a growl.

"And now, aunt Mat," said Mr. Percival, making himself comfortable in his own favorite chair, "here it is—my aunt Bartram is dead."

"Really! Well, I never saw her, or heard very much about her, except that she was your mother's eldest sister, and was very rich. Has she left you all her money?"

"That is precisely the tale which I am about to unfold," remarked Mr. Percival, lighting the mild cheroot which his aunt always sanctioned after dinner.

"Blodgett was her man of business," resumed he, in the abrupt and fragmentary style inseparable from smoking. "Or rather his father was, and young Blodgett inherited the position, but never saw the client. He's executor of the will, however—one of them, and her doctor was the other; but he, it seems, died before her. Blodgett came up to me this morning, and we went down to the Probate Office, and proved the old lady's will. All the money was left to me straight enough, but

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there was a letter accompanying it, addressed to me personally, which complicates matters. Blodgett gave me the letter, and after reading I showed it to him. He thinks as I do, that it is a confoundedly queer affair."

"Walton!"

"Oh! Did I say confounded? Well, I didn't mean to, and I'll be a good boy, and never do so any more. Where was I? Oh, yes! at the letter of instructions. I'll show it to you, and you shall judge for yourself."

And holding the cheroot, now nearly burned up, between his teeth, wrinkling his forehead, elevating his eyebrows, and puffing in the spasmodic and painful manner incident to the smoking of a short stump of segar, while both hands are engaged in another occupation, Mr. Percival fumbled in his breast-pocket, found, and opened his note-case, and extracted a letter, while his aunt severely remarked,

"What the pleasure of strangling yourself, and burning your lips, and putting out your eyes with that nasty smoke, can be, I, for one, cannot imagine. Why don't you take the thing out of your mouth, and lay it down while——"

"There, aunty, there's the letter. Read it aloud, if you please."

And Walton, tossing the letter upon the table, leaned far back in his chair, with an air of exhaustion, and quietly lighted another cheroot from the stump of the old one. Aunt Matilda put up her double eye-glass, and opened the letter.

"To my nephew, Walton Percival, these," began she, and, with a little flush, interrupted herself to say, "It seems very strange to see somebody else calling you her nephew—don't it, Walty?"

"Don't be jealous, you darling," mumbled Mr. Percival, struggling with the new and reluctant segar; and aunt Matilda, smiling, continued.

"I have never seen you, Walton Percival, and your mother was so much younger than myself, that she hardly seemed my sister; but so far as I know, you are the only male relation whom I possess; and I, therefore, choose you as my heir, but upon conditions.

"I wish that, immediately upon my decease, you should go down to my old house of Bartram's Holme, and should make it your constant residence for the next three months; and I wish that you should invite your cousin Rosamond, the daughter of your mother's nephew, John Thorne, to become your guest, with her adopted sister, Delia Thorne, and whatever matron you and she may find agreeable for the same length of time. Your aunt, Miss Matilda Percival, will be as suitable as any person I can suggest, and, I suppose, as agreeable to you. My old servant and housekeeper, who will remain in the house, is not to be disturbed in her privileges, or her apartment, and will superintend the domestic arrangements.

"And, in the event of Miss Thorne's accepting this invitation, I bequeath to her, through you, the contents of the mahogany wardrobe, in the north-west chamber of Bartram's Holme, and my thanks; and, if she refuses, I leave her as a legacy the assurance that she has bitterly disappointed and injured a woman who never injured her, and whose life has been one long sorrow. Anna Bartram."

Thus abruptly ended this singular letter; and aunt Matilda, dropping it upon her knee, looked up at her nephew with startled eyes.

"Rosamond Thorne!" exclaimed she. "Why it was her grandmother who——"

"Who what, aunt Mat?"

"Why, she was the mother of Rosamond Thorne's father," replied aunt Matilda, in much confusion.

"Very singular conduct on her part. Did she do anything else as remarkable as that?" gravely inquired her nephew.

"Nonsense, Walton! Mrs. Thorne the elder, Rosamond's grandmother, was sister to your mother and Mrs. Bartram."

"Yes—what next?"

"Well, it is rather a painful subject, Walton, but I suppose you ought to know it; the fact is, that Mrs. Thorne was—not quite correct, you understand."

Mr. Percival nodded, and through his half-closed lids watched his maiden aunt's crimsoning face with amused scrutiny.

"She was considerably younger than Mrs. Bartram; and when she was left a widow, with one little boy, she came to live at Bartram's Holme, and for awhile everything went very well; but after that—— Well, in short, Walton, she and Mr. Bartram went away together very suddenly."

"Eloped?" inquired Walton, raising his eyebrows.

"Yes. It was a very dreadful affair, and every one was glad to hush it up as soon as possible. Mrs. Bartram sent the little boy to his father's family, and shut herself up in her old house, with only one servant—and so she lived ever since. Some people say she went mad—and certainly she was very peculiar. Your father never permitted your mother to hold any intercourse either with her or the

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Thornes, although John Thorne grew up a nice boy, married well, and left a very pretty daughter, your cousin Rosamond. To be sure, there was a little talk about that adopted child of his—but people are so censorious."

"Mr. John Thorne, my cousin, had two children, then," remarked Walton Percival, making a note in his memorandum-book, "Rosamond, his acknowledged daughter, and—what is the name of the unacknowledged one, aunt Matilda?"

"Why, Walton Percival! I never said, and I'm sure I never thought—— Well, the girl's name is Delia; and people did think it rather queer when he took her home soon after his wife's death, and brought her up in his own house; but I'm sure I know nothing about it, and don't want to."

"Rosamond, acknowledged daughter and heiress, and Delia, unacknowledged and dependent daughter," muttered Mr. Percival, reading his notes. "Well, aunty, what next?"

"Why, I believe that is all. Of course, John Thorne is as much Mrs. Bartram's nephew as you are; but he is dead, and if he was not, Mrs. Bartram would hardly like to leave her property, or any portion of it, to the son of a person who had so wronged her, even though it was her own sister."

"Being a woman, she probably would not," coolly replied Mr. Percival. "What became of Mr. Bartram, and my incorrect aunt, Mrs. Thorne?"

"It never was known. From the night of their elopement nothing was ever heard of them—that is, by the public. If your aunt Bartram ever heard anything, she kept it to herself."

"Poor woman! She and her skeleton must have had a jolly life of it down at Bartram's Holme. Did ever you see the place, aunt Mat?"

"No. Of course I knew nothing about it until my brother married your mother, and as I say, he never allowed any communication between her and her family," said Miss Matilda, rather coldly; and her nephew smiled to himself, having long ago discovered that in Miss Percival's opinion his mother had been the merest appendage and adjunct of the brother whom she adored.

"Well then," said he, "I suppose the next thing to be done is to look up my cousin Rosamond, give her this invitation, and if she accepts, for all of us to go down to Bartram's Holme, and spend our three months as pleasantly as may be. It is fortunate that my aunt died in the spring instead of the autumn."

"Rosamond Thorne and Delia—I believe Mr. Thorne gave her his name legally at last—board in the family of Mr. Stephen Westerfeldt, Miss Thorne's guardian, although she is now of age. I will call there with you, if you like, as I am slightly acquainted with Mrs. Westerfeldt."

"If you would only call there without me, aunt Mat," said Percival, with a weary grimace. "It is such an awful bore to face a whole family of new people. I don't mind the young lady herself, of course; but the Westerfeldts' represents an unknown and appalling quantity. Go by yourself, that's a precious darling."

"Very well; but you will have to see Mr. Westerfeldt at his office, and show him the letter, and tell the story, you know."

"That I can do. One man does not terrify me particularly, but a family—when will you go?"

"To-morrow, before dinner. Perhaps, I will bring Rosamond home with me."

"And the other—we must not be rude to my cousin's adopted daughter, aunt Mat; and it would be neither delicate nor just to insist upon parading our knowledge of the scandal, if any, that is attached to her origin."

"Of course not. I will write Miss Delia Thorne also," replied aunt Matilda, with an air of grim concession.

CHAPTER II.

The next evening Mr. Percival arrived at home full fifteen minutes earlier than his usual time, and was rewarded upon his descent to the drawing-room by the sight of two pretty girls seated upon the sofa, to whom his aunt Matilda was talking with more fluency and ease than she often exhibited toward strangers.

"Ah, Walton! have you got home so early!" exclaimed she, gayly. "My nephew, Mr. Percival; Miss Thorne, and Miss Delia Thorne," she continued.

Both young ladies bowed, both young ladies smiled, and murmured the indefinite phrase with which persons generally acknowledge an introduction; and Mr. Percival performing the same ceremony, wondered how he was to find out which young lady was Miss Thorne, and which Miss Delia; and while the lively but commonplace chat, which his entrance had interrupted, went on, he occupied himself in examining the faces of the two girls, and trying to decide which he should prefer to claim as his cousin, and which to consider as Mr. Thorne's adopted daughter.

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Both were pretty, but in the most diverse styles, for one was slight and small, with a pure white skin, like the leaf of a calla lily, red only in the sensitive lips, which continually displayed her beautifully small teeth, with light gray eyes, deeply shadowed by dark locks and brows, and with a wonderful profusion of reddish, golden hair, wound round and round in a massive coil at the back of the head, but breaking into a thousand tiny spirals about the forehead, low, and wide, and smooth as that of Venus.

"A piquant little darling—I hope she is Rosamond," mused Mr. Percival, turning almost reluctantly toward her companion, a tall, slender girl, with the lithe and virginal form of a young Diana, with a haughty head, a dark, glowing face, full of color, and fire centering in the great, passionate eyes, dark as a pansy's nether petal, slumbrous and vivid as the flames half hidden, half revealed, in the deep crater of a volcano. As if in contempt of the fashion which ordained that the hair should be carried away from the face and massed at the top of the head, this proud brunette had arranged hers in drooping folds and braids, defining the tempting oval of the cheek, and making a dusky background, into which the rich colors of the face blended with an effect truly artistic. Below the lowest line of shadowy hair appeared the tip of a little ear, and the gleam of a great garnet, whose deep heart seemed to catch and hold the sun's own light and fire.

"A splendid creature!" thought he. "If she is Rosamond, I wonder if my aunt Bartram schemed for us to marry."

"Don't you hope so, Mr. Percival?" suddenly inquired the object of his reverie, turning her bewildering eyes full upon his.

"Indeed, I do," replied he, answering his own thought, and caring very little what the question might have been. But Miss Matilda, coloring scarlet with surprise and horror, soon recalled him to his senses.

"Why, Walton Percival, do you know what you are saying? Miss Thorne asked if you did not hope she and her sister would tire of the seclusion of Bartram's Holme, and return to town before the three months are over."

A general laugh followed the explanation, and shielded Walton's embarrassment; but one idea joyfully shaped itself in the young man's mind, and remained there.

"She is Miss Thorne, then. I am very glad."

The dinner-bell cut short the somewhat confused explanation to which nobody listened; and Percival gladly hastened to offer his arm to the object of his apology, and continue it in a lower voice. Miss Matilda and the companion followed—and the dinner passed as gayly and pleasantly as possible. Later in the evening, Percival made the charming discovery that his cousin could sing, and that she liked his favorite music, and that she knew much more of it than he did, and that her voice harmonized perfectly with his own; and, altogether, it is no matter for surprise that, in arranging a music-book upon the rack before her, our hero took occasion to whisper,

"I am so glad, so very glad, that you are my cousin, Rosamond—may I call you Rosamond?"

Miss Thorne finished the prelude she was playing, sang the first verse of her song, and then, her fingers still busy with the keys, flashed up a look half defiant, half imploring,

"I am not Rosamond," said she. "I thought you knew—and now you will not care anything about me."

The trifling fingers quickened their motion upon the keys, and broke into a wild fantasia. It finished, and Miss Delia Thorne rose from the piano, and returned to the sofa, where still sat her cousin, who met her with a smile.

"What freak was that, Delia?" asked she.

"Oh! I found I was not in the mood for singing, so finished with something else," said the young lady, carelessly; and from that moment, although the brilliancy of her wit, and the sparkling flow of her conversation were the life of the whole party, Percival could not gain one moment's especial attention, not even so much as a look; nor could he continue in any manner to express the regret he really felt at having made so mortifying a blunder. Mr. Westerfeldt's carriage came for the young ladies at ten o'clock, and Percival handing them in, was just beginning a low-toned apology to her whose hand he lingeringly clasped, when it was interrupted by,

"Oh! I beg your pardon, Mr. Percival, but will you be so kind as to say to Miss Percival that I will bring her that book to-morrow."

"Certainly. At what hour shall I tell her?"

"I can hardly say. Rosamond, at what hour shall we call upon Miss Percival to-morrow?"

"About twelve, I think."

"Yes; or, perhaps, a little later—at almost any time between eleven and six; but she must not stay in a moment on our account, must she, Rosamond? We can leave the book, you know."

"Certainly. Pray, beg your aunt not to alter her engagements in the least on our account, cousin Walton," said Miss Thorne; and Walton

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gratefully wished it had been Delia who called him cousin so sweetly.

"Poor little thing!" thought he, as the carriage drove away. "How her sister extinguishes her. She might be quite attractive by herself; but when one sees that splendid Delia, he cannot remember poor, little Rose."

And Rose, nestling into the corner of the carriage, was making much the same mental remark to herself, while a few unbidden tears forced themselves into her pathetic gray eyes, and quietly rolled down her cheeks.

"You are tired, poor little Rosamond," said Delia, as she noticed the movement, but not the tears. "That formal Miss Percival was too much for you, was she not?"

"Oh, no! I liked her exceedingly."

"Really? And how do you like your cousin?"

"Very well, I believe. He is handsome, is he not?"

"Well enough. I do not admire blonde men. Do you know he was so stupid as to mistake me for Miss Thorne, the heiress, and his kinswoman?"

"I do not think it stupid. You look much more like it than I do, and talk and act it yet more than you look it."

"You mean that I am too forward, and forget my position; forget my doubtful, or disgraceful birth, my poverty, and the fact that I am only your companion, not equal——"

"Oh, hush! hush, Delia! You have no right to speak so; it is most cruel, most unjust, both to me and to my father, who was also your adopted father, and treated you, both in his life and in his death, as his own child."

"Well, well, Rosamond, we won't quarrel again over that. I am sorry if I have injured your feelings; but mine were cruelly hurt to-night as I read the look of consternation upon that splendid puppy's face, when he discovered that he had been paying court to the poor dependent, instead of his wealthy kinswoman."

"You wrong my cousin, and you are not in a happy humor to-night, Delia," began Rosamond, coldly; but was stopped by Delia, who, breaking into a passion of tears, threw herself upon the floor of the carriage, her head in Rosamond's lap, and there sobbed out the bitterness aroused in her morbidly sensitive feelings by Percival's most unfortunate mistake.

Rosamond soothed her tenderly, but thoughtfully. Already the shadow of coming sorrow and perplexity darkened her heart, and gave her a feeling of undefined uneasiness.

CHAPTER III.

Two weeks later, a handsome, open carriage, drawn by a pair of powerful black horses, rolled over the leafy and secluded road leading from the little town of Glynn to the estate of Bartram's Holme. Its occupants were Miss Percival, the two Miss Thornes, and Capt. Royal Page, a gentleman whom Walton Percival had invited at the last moment, to be company for his aunt, as he mischievously remarked, much to Miss Matilda's indignation, although, as she hesitatingly added, Capt. Page was a very estimable gentleman, and not ill-looking for his time of life, which might be about fifty. Percival, himself, sat upon the driver's seat, beside a shrewd, hard-featured Scotch-Yankee coachman, Ichabod Macpherson by name, who had been for many years a retainer of the Percival family, sometimes in one capacity, and sometimes in another. Sitting half turned upon the seat, so that his arm rested upon the back of the adjoining one, in close proximity to Rosamond's shoulder, while he faced Delia, who sat with Miss Matilda upon the back seat, Walton Percival was repeating such particulars of his late aunt's mode of life, as he had picked up from the talkative landlord of the village inn, where they had just dined.

"It seems," said he, "that she lived absolutely alone, with an old woman as servant. Such small supplies as they needed were carried to them by a lad from a neighboring farm, who called every morning for orders. He saw sometimes an old woman, and sometimes two, until one morning the one who came to the door to take in his marketing, remarked,

"'My mistress is dead. Send a woman.'

"The boy, frightened out of his wits, ran headlong home, and his father and mother went immediately over to the 'great house,' as they call it, and there, to be sure, lay Miss Bartram ready dressed for the grave, with her old servant sitting at her feet. They brought a doctor, and a coroner, who decided that she had died from natural causes, a sort of general decay, I should imagine: and so she was buried. The old woman still remains in the house, and I suppose we must let her remain."

"Certainly, poor thing! I dare say she has no other home," replied aunt Matilda.

"I wonder how long she has lived there," said Rosamond.

"I have always heard that Mrs. Bartram had an old servant with her, and I dare say this is the same one she retained when she dismissed all the others and closed her house," said aunt

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Matilda, glancing uneasily at Rosamond, who, pale and still, looked at the bare, wide fields they were skirting, and said nothing.

"This must be the place—turn in at this gateway, Ichabod," said Mr. Percival, pointing to a gap between two high posts ornamented with carved wooden urns at the top.

"You are ingenious to have discovered a gateway at all, Mr. Percival," said Delia Thorne, laughing, as they rolled over a little bridge, and up a long avenue of elms, so untrimmed and luxuriant that their branches swept into the carriage as it passed.

"A happy instinct," replied Walton, gayly. "But see, here we have a view of the house. I did not suppose it was so large."

Every one eagerly looked as he pointed, and saw a massive, square building, three stories in height, and built like most American houses of its age, however important, of the wood so abundant in a new country. It was painted of a dark-gray color, even the four tall chimneys presenting the same sombre tint, which seemed deepened, rather than relieved, by the dark-green blinds closed over nearly every window. A row of Lombardy poplars stood mournful sentinels before the principal entrance, and weeping-willows waved at the side. Overgrown shrubs and vines crowded and clambered upon the old house, as if striving to hide its stern decay, and rank grasses lay tangled and matted upon the untrodden terrace, to which a flight of shallow steps of red sandstone led from the carriage-way. Between two of these steps a willow shoot had forced its way, and with the slow persistence of its soft and flexible growth had gradually upheaved the upper stone, until the whole was shaken and disarranged. Pointing at it as the carriage slowly passed, Delia murmured in Rosamond's ear,

"See! That is what you gentle little creatures do."

"An iron bar would have done it much more quickly, and with less harm to itself," replied Rosamond, with a meaning smile.

"Am I iron? I wish I were," replied Delia; and just then Walton Percival opened the carriage-door, and gave his hand first to his aunt.

"We have to content ourselves with the side entrance," said he. "Mine host warned me that the front door opened to no one. Even my aunt's funeral-train passed out at the side entrance."

"Don't talk of funerals any more, please," said Rosamond, nervously, as her cousin helped her from the carriage. "Everything is so lugubrious here—even the sky is gray."

"Some gray things are very pretty—eyes, for instance," said Walton, gayly; and Rosamond raised the gray eyes gravely to his face, then dropped them without a smile.

"She has never forgiven my selecting Delia as Miss Thorne," thought Walton, as he followed his aunt up the steps to the porched door, where she was already knocking.

"Do you hear any one within?" asked she.

"Hush! Yes—don't you?" replied Miss Matilda, bending her ear to catch the feeble and hesitating steps which came slowly down the passage within. An uncertain hand withdrew the bolts and raised the latch, and then the door swinging slowly open, showed the upright figure of an old woman, her white and solemn face seamed with wrinkles, from among which looked two stern, sad eyes, dark and sombre as the gray old house, and forming a vivid contrast with the white hair folded away beneath a close muslin cap. Without greeting of any sort, this strange figure stood there mute and motionless as the sphynx, until Walton Percival, politely uncovering, said, in his pleasant voice,

"You, I presume, are Mrs. Bartram's old companion and friend, of whom I have often heard. I am her nephew, Mr. Percival, and this is my aunt, Miss Percival. Will you show us to a sitting-room?"

"My name is Nancy. Come this way," And with no further greeting, the old woman led the way through a small lobby to a lofty, dark parlor, its walls wainscoted with native wood, its floor spread with an antique Turkey carpet, its two wide windows opening upon the tangled shrubbery at the eastern side of the house. The one cheerful thing in the room was a fire, built of maple-logs in the great cavernous chimney.

"Ah! this is comfortable!" exclaimed Miss Matilda, going toward it; and then turning to look at the old woman, who stood beside the door, waiting until the rest of the party should enter.

"It was very kind of you to make us a fire," said she, pleasantly, "the evenings are still quite chilly. Our servants and baggage will be here presently; and, perhaps, you will be so kind as to show us to our rooms, and see about some tea. We are all very tired."

With no reply, save a nod of the head, the old woman passed through the room, and out of a door at the further end.

"I suppose we are to follow, my dears," remarked Miss Matilda, with a scared smile; and

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passing through the door, the ladies found themselves in a long, dark hall, the bowed front door at one end, and at the other a flight of stairs, starting from the center of the hall and dividing near the top into two branches, each of which led to a gallery running round the hall, and giving entrance to the chambers. At the front of the hall both galleries ended in a deep bay-window extending over the front door. A similar one at the back of the house overlooked the old orchard and flower-garden, and was reached by a short flight of steps starting from the same landing as the gallery-stairs; but as the dark, outside blinds were closed over both windows, the hall remained in dense shadow.

"Ugh!" said Delia, shuddering. "This is frightful, is it not?"

"Do you think so?" replied Rose, casting eager glances down the galleries, and into the dim recesses of the side corridors as they passed along. "I like it; there seems so much romance and mystery about the house. I shall spend much of my time in exploring these dark passages and closed rooms."

As she said these words, the old woman, who preceded the party, paused, with her hand upon the latch of a door, and fixing her stern, dark eyes upon the young girl's joyous face, said, impressively,

"You had better not do it, Miss; there's them that uses these rooms that you wouldn't like to meet."

"What! Is the place haunted?" asked Rosamond, with breathless interest, while Miss Matilda, deadly pale, clung to the carved balustrade of the gallery for support, and Delia fixed her dark eyes upon the old woman with half-contemptuous, half-wondering attention. But Nancy heeded none of them; throwing open the door, she turned to Miss Percival with the brief remark,

"That's for you!"

Aunt Matilda obediently entered, and the others looked into the chamber with some curiosity; it was large, dark, hung with old-fashioned green moreen window and bed-curtains, and was enlivened by some old family portraits, painted in the stiff and sombre style of the last century. Aunt Matilda looked forlornly about her, then turned to the old housekeeper.

"Does anybody sleep near me? I am a little timid in a strange place."

"This next room is for the young man; and there can be another bed put in it for the gentleman you have brought with you. They sleep in there," replied Nancy, pointing to the door which they had just passed.

"I am glad my nephew is close at hand," murmured Miss Matilda. "And where will the young ladies be?"

"The other front room is for Miss Thorne—which is she?" asked Nancy, surveying the two girls from head to foot.

"I am Miss Thorne, and this is my sister, Miss Delia Thorne," said Rosamond, gently; "and we shall prefer sleeping together—we are accustomed to it."

"Your sister! I didn't know John Thorne had more than one child," replied the old woman, staring at Delia, who flushed an angry red, while Rosamond hastily said,

"My adopted sister—my father's adopted child."

"That is different. Yes, I know all about that," muttered Nancy, dryly; and proceeding along the gallery and past the deep recess of the oriel-window, she opened the door of a large, front chamber, answering in position to that assigned to Miss Percival. The furniture was, however, lighter in style, the hangings of a gay-flowered, although old-fashioned, chintz, and a few bits of bright china scattered here and there, some colored engravings against the wall, and a vase of flowers upon the dressing-table, gave the apartment an air of cheerfulness and welcome which the other entirely lacked.

"This is the pleasantest room I have yet seen in the house," said Rosamond, surveying it with pleasure. "And you would rather share it with me than to sleep by yourself, would you not, Delia?"

"She will have to," harshly interposed Nancy, before Delia could reply; "there is no other, except servants' rooms."

"In this great house!" exclaimed Delia, rather haughtily. "Why, who sleeps in the fourth room on this floor, the one answering in position to Mr. Percival's?"

"I do. I always did; and Mrs. Bartram left it in her will that I should always have that room, and what is in it, for my own," replied Nancy, doggedly.

"And the third story?" asked Delia.

"That is not used at all—it is not safe," replied Nancy, in the same tone.

"Where do the servants sleep, then?"

"In the wing-chambers, over the kitchen and laundry. The entry between my chamber and this leads to that part of the house," replied the old woman, and opening a door, she showed a dark and narrow passage bounding that side

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of the room, and finished at the lower end by a green-baize door.

"You may go and look at the servants' rooms if you choose," said she, harshly.

"Come, then, Mrs. Bluebeard," replied Rosamond, gayly; and then the two tripped down the passage, and throwing open the green door, and a heavy wooden one behind it, found themselves in a large, half-finished chamber, with a servants' stair-case coming up at one side, and a door at the further end. Crossing the room, Nancy opened the door, and showed a short passage, with doors at either side.

"These are the servants' rooms, and this unfinished chamber is the laundry drying-room," said she, briefly; and the two girls, after glancing about them a little, were glad to return to their own warm and cheerful apartment.

Leaving them there, old Nancy went down the back stairs, muttering something about tea, and the trouble of visitors.

"What a cross-grained old creature," remarked Delia, looking into the mirror, and taking off her hat. "She evidently intends to rule us all as she did her late mistress."

"Yes," replied Rosamond, absently. "Do look at this wardrobe, Delia."

"Wardrobe? Why, yes, that is curious." And Delia examined with interest the massive structure, built of rich, dark mahogany, and mounted with brass mouldings, which occupied one corner of the room. The front was divided into four doors, two meeting in the middle, and two more at the side of them, denoting three compartments; but those doors were not only locked, but the keyholes were covered with wax, sealed with a crest and the initials A. B. It was this circumstance which had drawn forth Rosamond's exclamation of surprise. Delia looked, and suddenly said,

"I suppose this is the wardrobe you are to inherit if you stay here the three months out, Rosamond; and it is sealed, so that you shall not pick the locks and help yourself to the treasure before it is lawfully yours."

"They need not have taken so much trouble; of course, I should not have pryed into anything which was purposely kept from me," said Rosamond, rather indignantly; and Delia, laughing, returned to the mirror.

"Shouldn't you? Well, I am more curious; and I would give sixpence at this very moment for a chance of ransacking that grim old wardrobe."

"So would I give sixpence; but I could not pick locks, or break seals, or abuse confidence," replied Rose.

CHAPTER. IV.

The next morning broke cloudlessly, and the rising sun, streaming through the open window into Rosamond's eyes, roused her from her light slumbers, and drew her from the bed to the window, where she beheld a view so lovely and so attractive that, making a hasty toilet, she stole quietly from the room and the house, and finding her way to the overgrown and tangled shrubbery, and through that to the garden, she paced up and down, inhaling the fragrance of the early blossoms, admiring the fresh, young verdure, and listening with delight to the songs of the birds, who crowded the mystic old trees, and welcomed the summer and the morning with fullest-throated praise.

Suddenly, in rounding a thicket of rose-trees, she encountered Mr. Percival, walking slowly along, his hands behind him, and his head bowed in deep thought. At sight of his cousin he hesitated a moment, then turned and walked along beside her.

"I was thinking of you," said he, abruptly, "and wondering why you dislike me."

"A modest wonder! You had thought no one could fail to like you, then," replied Rosamond.

"Your sarcasm, and your scornful carelessness, only prove my accusation correct. You do dislike me, cousin," said Percival.

"Do I? Well, then, why do I?"

"Nay, that is for you to tell," said Percival, earnestly; but Rosamond lightly answered,

"No, you shall be special pleader, advocate, judge, jury, and all, in this case."

"And the accused does not care enough for the accusation even to plead, 'Not guilty,'" said Percival.

"The accusation is so fanciful that it is not worth pleading for or against," replied Rosamond, in the same careless tone she had hitherto used. Percival did not reply for some moments, but at last he said,

"I wish you would be my friend and cousin; I want one very much, especially to-day."

"And why especially to-day?"

"I have a confidence to make, and you are the person to whom I wish to make it—or I shall make it to no one."

"A confidence? And why to me, Mr. Percival?"

"Don't say Mr. Percival, Rosamond. We are, at least, cousins, and you should call me by my name."

"Well, then, cousin Walton, why to me?"

"Because you are the only suitable person. My aunt Matilda would be frightened out of

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her senses; your sister, I could not tell her; and as for Capt. Page, it does not in the least concern him, and you would not wish that he should know it."

"You have at last aroused my curiosity," said Rosamond, raising her lovely gray eyes curiously to his face, "and now you must gratify it."

"Last night, after you had all retired, I sat reading," he began, "and I became so interested that I did not think of the time until the failure of my lamp suggested that it must be growing late—a suspicion confirmed by my watch, which showed the quarter past one. The fire had long been dead, and the glimmer which showed the hands of my watch was the expiring effort of the lamp, so that I was left in total darkness. I groped upon the mantle-shelf for a candle, or even a match, but found none, and was presently satisfied that I could expect no help from the sense of sight in making my way up stairs. Leaving the library, I navigated the length of the great hall with tolerable success, and reached the foot of the stair-case. You remember that there is a window about half-way up, with a short flight of steps leading to it, and a seat beneath it."

"Yes, I remember that."

"And you remember that the blinds of that window are closed, for you or Delia remarked upon the sombre shadow of the hall."

"Yes, I remember that also."

"Well, Rosamond, as I went up that stair-case, and reached the landing, I saw a woman standing in the window recess just at the top of the short flight of steps—saw her as distinctly as I now see you."

"Saw her by what light?" inquired Rosamond, incredulously.

"I do not know. I understand your tone, and I cannot combat its doubt, except by the simple assertion of my perfect sanity and truthfulness. A moment before, the darkness of the place had been so intense that I could not discern the position of the stairs, or even see my own hand as I held it up before me, and yet, when I raised my eyes, I beheld this woman's face, figure, dress, as distinctly as I now see yours, and, were I an artist, could reproduce them with the most minute distinctness."

"I must believe you, cousin, when you speak so earnestly," said Rosamond, more gently. "What sort of woman was she?"

"Young, not more than five-and-twenty, slight in figure, and—I will not say what I thought of her face, Rosamond, for it was yours."

"Mine!"

"Yes, precisely. So completely yours that I supposed it to be you, and spoke your name. No answer came, but the eyes of the apparition, for I now call it such, fixed themselves upon mine so mournfully, and so earnestly, that I sprung up the stairs to the window, fully impressed with the belief that you had met with some terrible misfortune, and were imploring me for help, or redress. As I reached the top of the stairs, the figure retreated to the depth of the bay-window, and then gliding around the side, and down the stairs, turned upon the landing, and looking back at me with those terribly imploring eyes, seemed waiting for me to follow.

"'What is it? What shall I do? Rosamond, is it you?' I exclaimed, for the first time beginning to doubt your bodily presence. Still there was no reply; but the figure, gliding swiftly up the remaining stairs leading to the gallery, paused at the entrance of the passage between your room and that used by the old housekeeper. Half shrinking, yet unable to turn back, I followed. At the door of your chamber it paused, and extending both hands with a caressing motion, seemed to hesitate as if about to enter, but finally kept on, and disappeared through the green door at the end of the entry. I followed as fast as I could, but on arriving at the door found it fastened upon my side by a strong brass hook. I opened it, and the wooden one which it screened, and found myself in utter darkness, the mysterious light that had hitherto led me having totally disappeared. After waiting for a moment without seeing or hearing anything, I closed the two doors, hooked the inner one, and felt my way to my own chamber, where I slept for a few fours; but rising with the first daylight, returned to the spot where I had lost sight of the figure upon the preceding night. I found the door fastened as I had left it, and opening both, passed through into a large, unfinished chamber, with a stair-case in one corner, apparently connecting with the kitchen region——"

"I have seen that room," interposed Rose; "the servants' rooms lie beyond it, and it is possible——"

"That I mistook some Bridget, or Katy, or Molly, for my cousin Rosamond?" asked Percival, ironically. "Nor was I dreaming, as, perhaps, you will next suggest, for, close beside the door, in the unfinished room, I picked up this." And Mr. Percival showed a handkerchief marked with his own name.

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Rosamond examined, and returned it thoughtfully.

"And she looked like me?" said she.

"Almost exactly, except for the fashion of the hair, which was worn flowing down the back in a great rippling mass of shining curls."

"Do you remember the dress?"

"Perfectly, for it was very peculiar, the material being silk, which rustled and crackled as it moved, as if very thick and stiff; in color it was white, embroidered or brocaded with a running pattern of moss rose-buds. It was cut square upon the neck, and had sleeves ending at the elbows, with deep lace ruffles. At the bosom was a bow of soft-blue ribbon, with a few lilies-of-the-valley knotted in it."

"The dress is that of fifty years ago."

"Is it? That surprises me."

"Yes; and I, of course, have nothing of the sort in my wardrobe. Cousin Walton, tell me, once for all, are you actually serious? Did this really happen, and are not you jesting with my simplicity?"

"I feel a little hurt at such a question, Miss Thorne. I should be incapable of so ungentlemanly and puerile a jest, and——"

"Forgive my doubt," interrupted Rosamond, hastily. "But it is all so strange!"

"Excessively strange!" assented Walton, his brow clearing immediately. "I cannot wonder at your incredulity. Now the reason I have told the story to you is, that from the close resemblance of the apparition to yourself, I cannot but believe that its visit referred in some manner to you, and it is with you I wish to consult upon the use that shall be made of it."

"The use?"

"Yes; these things mean something, although it is not possible for us at present to understand what; and I do not hesitate to say that I believe the appearance I saw last night was a supernatural one, and made itself visible to us for a purpose. What that purpose is we are now to attempt to discover."

"Do you expect to see it again?"

"How can I tell? But, yes, I do so expect, for, as yet, it has affected nothing; and I have just said I believe it comes with a purpose. Will you help me discover it?"

"Yes, certainly, if I can, and if it is really something worth serious attention."

"Still a little incredulous, I see; but wait," replied Percival, with a smile. "Now, how are we to contrive the matter. Will you watch with me to-night?"

"How can I without speaking to your aunt, or—— It would be so odd," suggested Rosamond, blushing a little, and smiling more.

"Would it? Well, will you wait in your own room until I call you? I will tap gently on the door at a little after twelve."

"I—I hardly like to make such an arrangement," stammered Rosamond, confused.

"Remember that I am your cousin, and that this is a matter in which we are only involved, as seeking the explanation of strange phenomena."

"Yes, but—— Well, I will meet you on the stair-case at a little after twelve. You need not call me, for I shall not go to sleep before that."

"Thank you, Rosamond, both for your consent, and for the sacrifice of the young lady-like scruples, which came near negativing it. You are a sensible girl!"

And taking his cousin's hand in his, Mr. Percival playfully kissed it; then putting it under his arm, turned to retrace their steps. In doing so they came face to face with Delia, who, forcing a smile, which could not quite cover the frown upon her face, exclaimed,

"What, romancing so early in the morning? They say that breakfast is ready, and I am sent to call you."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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PARTED BY FATE.

BY FRANK LEE BENEDICT.

I.

THE heavy gates clanged behind them, the carriage rolled swiftly up the winding avenue, and presently the mansion-house appeared among the great trees, the setting sun lighting its casements like an illumination over this return that was to make the old house so joyous.

"We are home, Agatha; you had not forgotten how it looked?"

Agatha Bourne did not answer her father; she was leaning out of the window, gazing about in search of familiar objects, wondering that there should be no trace of change during this term of absence, which had brought her back as unlike her former self as if she had been transformed into a new being.

The suns of eighty summers have shone, and their roses bloomed, since the time of which I write, weaving no romance, only a history, gathered from faded letters and journals, that have outlived the hands which penned them.

Agatha Bourne had been gone two years; and from eighteen to twenty life passes so rapidly that one marvels to revisit the quiet haunts of childhood, and find that while existence has deepened into feverish unrest they have suffered no change.

"Does it look like home, Agatha?" her father kept questioning.

Agatha leaned back in her seat, and allowed her veil to fall over her face as she answered,

"Not a leaf is changed! It might be the enchanted castle in old nurse's fairy story, for any alteration there is."

She had returned! Often, during the first year of her stay in that foreign land, Agatha had dreamed of coming back, and had fancied the perfect content that would fill her heart as the familiar hill and dwelling came in sight. She had returned; the clang of the heavy gates had sounded like the shutting of a tomb, and her soul seemed to read, on the gray front of the house, the dreary line from the old Italian poet, that only a few months before she had dreamed over under the orange-trees of his beautiful land.

The carriage stopped at the great entrance. Agatha was assisted out by her father, and stood for an instant gazing down upon the landscape spread beneath the height on which the mansion stood. The Hudson gleamed a golden scroll in the evening light; the mountains were misty with the purple haze of early summer, and the wild, picturesque scene wore its fullest beauty.

Only a moment, then her father claimed her attention again; and out of the house, roused by the sound of the carriage-wheels, came stately aunt Dorothy to fold her in an embrace of chilly delight; and old nurse, with as hearty a burst of weeping as if it had been the saddest, instead of the most joyful day of her life, as she felt and pronounced it. A whole troop of servants and dogs to welcome back the young mistress, and she knew that she ought to be glad to see them, to be grateful for the affection, and was, only there was no warmth in her heart; and it was dreadful to feel that even this moment could not bring the brightness and zest back to her life.

A beautiful old place that stands to-day scarcely changed, which even then had no chilling appearance of newness, for, more than a quarter of a century before, Agatha's father had built the house in the midst of that stately wood, as a summer-home for his young wife. Children had been born and died there; and last of all, the wife and mother had been carried out to sleep in the family-vault, and Roger Bourne was left alone with the helpless babe, whose little life had cost him so dearly.

Two years before, Mr. Bourne had consented that Agatha should be taken abroad by a maternal relative to finish her studies, and have a glimpse of the great world beyond seas. How hard a trial it was to give her up the old man never told; the state of his health did not permit any thought of his accompanying her, but whatever seemed best for the child must be done; and it was feared that she inherited the delicate constitution of her mother, whom late in life Roger Bourne had married while she was still a young girl—so every way the necessity of the separation was forced upon him.

But she was at home now—his Agatha, his one priceless treasure—not a child or girl any longer, but developed into a woman more beautiful even than the child had promised, yet perplexing and troubling him a little by the difference.

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He led her into the house, and aunt Dorothy followed as primly as if she had been the goddess of Propriety; though nurse somewhat disturbed the stateliness of the scene by making unexpected dashes at her former charge, with such doleful sobs of delight that the very dogs howled as if it had been a funeral.

Agatha knew that her father was watching every look, and tried by affectionate words to make amends for the lack of joy that she feared was in her face. Years before, the heavy carved furniture that decorated the rooms had been brought from across seas, and everything was so rich and picturesque that Agatha might have fancied herself standing in some old world mansion in the sunny land of France. But all this was only another pang. She would rather have come back to the humblest dwelling, in which there should be no object to remind her of that life which had come so suddenly to an end, between which and her present the ocean shut out all hope of restoration as completely as if it had been the eternal gulf.

"You are sure you are glad to be at home, Agatha?" her father questioned, with the restless eagerness of affection.

"I am glad to be anywhere with you, papa," she answered.

"And you'll not regret France, and all its vanities?"

"I was glad to come away," she said, with energy; "very glad."

"Ah, ha, Dorothy!" cried the delighted old man, "you see foreign ways haven't spoiled her, after all."

"I never supposed they would, brother," returned the spinster, severely; "Agatha had been too throughly grounded in her catechism and ethics to be injured by the frivolity of French manners, or those of her cousin, either, for that matter."

"You see, your aunt doesn't forgive her old enemy yet," Mr. Bourne said, laughing.

"I feel no enmity toward any one," answered Miss Dorothy, with increased dignity. "I trust my mind is too well disciplined to entertain any such dreadful sentiment. I don't think about Mrs. Masterton when I can help it; she seems to have done Agatha no harm, so let us be thankful and forget her till she comes to upset the house by one of her summer visits."

"Thankful enough I am to get her back," said Mr. Bourne; and Agatha felt a more ungrateful wretch than ever.

Aunt Dorothy bustled away, beset by some housewifely care—for, like most women of that generation, she gave herself and those about her no more rest than if they had all been machines, that must run without stopping until they broke down.

That night, as she sat alone in her room, Agatha Bourne looked back over the events of the past, which had so utterly come to an end, that she felt as a ghost might while reviewing the scene of its earthly mistakes and suffering.

I have read, in the faded records kept in her own dainty penmanship, the history of that lost past, but I shall give it to you in my own words. Even at this distance of time there seems something coarse and cruel in laying bare to the glance of the indifferent the entire secrets of that girlish soul, written with all the impulsiveness and passion of her age, never meant to be intrusted to any human eye, but which by some chance have so long outlasted the misery and wounded pride that gave them birth.

The first eighteen months of Agatha's sojourn had been spent in study or traveling about Italy; but when only half a year of her stay was left, and Mr. Bourne would not hear of her absence being prolonged a day after the appointed time, Mrs. Masterton took her niece back to France, that she might have a glance at the gorgeous court, where, in spite of gathering troubles, Marie Antoinette ruled more potently by the spells of her beauty and grace than ever the great conqueror who followed did in the fullness of his success.

Agatha's season of gayety was a very bright one, and she was so much sought after, that silly little Mrs. Masterton began to dream, as so many American women of our day do, of a crown prince, at least, for her charge. But Agatha would have laughed scornfully at the vision of a royal highness, if it had been confided to her, for she was living in one of those marvelous cloud-castles which most of us have built somewhere in our youth, and deemed so secure that they would resist the combined attacks of time and fate.

Once every week Agatha went to the house of an old French lady, whose mild entertainments Mrs. Masterton abhorred, though she was anxious not to offend her for the sake of certain relatives the ancient dame possessed, who did give invitations worth accepting; so she was glad to allow Agatha to do double duty on madame's evenings, and as the girl was a great favorite, Mrs. Masterton might have been astonished to discover how seldom she herself was missed.

Agatha met the hero of her dream there, and for months that sombre old saloon was the most beautiful spot on earth to her. She had gone

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to dine with madame, as was frequently her habit on the days of the receptions—but she did not find her friend, as usual, alone.

"Come in, my dear," the old lady said, as Agatha paused involuntarily on the threshold. "You are astonished that I do not play solitary as usual. But here is another kind heart besides your own that comes to see how the old lady fares, and I have promised if he is good that we will give him some dinner. Miss Bourne, this is my nephew, Mr. Cairn—*ma foi*, it is grand-nephew that I should say, but that makes me seem too ancient."

And madame rattled on with her pretty French eagerness, while Robert Cairn rose from his seat, and Agatha returned his salute, glancing with a shyness that she did not often feel toward the pale, handsome face, whose every change was soon to become so familiar to her.

"Yes, my grand-nephew; think of that, my little Agatha—it makes me seem like one of the fossils, does it not? But my pretty niece would marry a solemn Scotchman; and not content with that bit of insanity, she followed him off to America, and they are both dead, and only this great boy left to come back once in awhile and remind me of what is gone."

"That is giving you my family history in very few words, Miss Bourne," Cairn said, in English.

"And you are an American?" Agatha asked, in surprise.

"I understand," cried madame; "do not think to cheat my old ears with the English. Of course, he is American—all that there is of most so," she said, in broken idiom.

"Miss Bourne does not seem inclined to acknowledge me as a countryman," Cairn said, with a grave smile.

"Oh, yes," she replied. "Only it is unusual to meet Americans of your age here—generally they are too much occupied at home."

His face altered so quickly that she thought her heedless speech had annoyed him; but as it was difficult to know what to say, she was dropping into an awkward silence, when madame interposed volubly in her own tongue, not venturing to attempt the harsh English consonants, though she comprehended the language when spoken.

"He must come sometimes to see the old aunt," she said. "I am Robert's nearest kin; he is to live in Europe, hey, my boy?"

He bowed, and reverently kissed the hand which she extended to him, so dainty and white yet, in spite of her age.

"Have you lately left America, Mr. Cairn?" Agatha asked, in hopes to make amends for her former speech.

"I have not been there since I was a boy. I was not quite eighteen when I came away," he replied, so stiffly that again she felt as if she had been guilty of an unwarrantable liberty, and had three minds to take an aversion to the stately young man without delay.

"It is years since," added madame, looking fondly at him. "He seems so young, one would not take him for past seven-and-twenty, eh, Agatha?"

Agatha made no answer at all, she would not incur another forbidding glance from the solemn, gray eyes. She was just a little spoiled by the flattery of the past months, and began to wish herself at home instead of being doomed to conversation with this man, who seemed to disapprove of everything she said.

But her pouting mood did not last long; for, without the slightest warning, Robert Cairn warmed into a sunny, genial demeanor, and talked so pleasantly that the dinner passed off in the most charming way, and Agatha was quite vexed when it was over, and the guests began to arrive. But even then she did not lose Robert Cairn's society. Madame's elderly friends played trictrac, and he staid by her; but they were all too busy with their game to notice the pair.

From that time she saw him almost daily, and her dream grew into full beauty with the rapidity natural to her age. There was much about the man that she could not understand; a reticence which made her feel that there was a secret in his life that troubled him; strange alternations of manner, for which she could not account; but all these things did not weigh heavily enough to dispel the brightness of her vision.

The day came when with her womanly intuitions she knew that he loved her, and, in spite of her pride, she was glad to let her heart repeat the words. Yet he did not speak. There was the most delicate interest and attention—he showed plainly enough that his chief pleasure at this time was to arrange his days so that he might be most in her society; every glance of his sad eyes uttered his secret—but he did not speak.

The time for Agatha's departure was drawing near. It had not been mentioned in Cairn's presence, until one day when he came in and found her sitting with madame, the old lady said, abruptly,

"What will we do, Robert, when she is gone?"

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"Gone?" he repeated. "Where is she going?"

"Home, of course—to that dreadful America, a whole world off over the seas, and among the savages."

Robert Cairn muttered some unintelligible reply, and moved to the window; but Agatha caught sight of his face as he turned away. If he had been dead and cold, it could not have looked whiter and more ghastly.

Madame was busy with her netting, and her dim eyes did not see what was plain enough to Agatha, and she chattered on about her grief and desolation until, fond as she was of her, the girl felt an insane desire to choke her like a croaking blackbird.

"Is not this very sudden?" he asked, at length, still keeping his stand by the window.

"Of course not," returned madame. "You heard from the first that she had only three months to stay. I have the heart broken."

But, grieved as she was, she could not be oblivious to the fact that she needed some silk of a peculiar tint of blue, and if she sent her maid to look for it, she would bring back a dozen sorts, and neither of them the right color; so she must go into her bed-room and search for herself, and not disturb Manon, who was nearly as old as her mistress, and much blinder, with a temper which madame dreaded.

"This is very sudden to me," Robert Cairn said, approaching Agatha, as his ancient relative trotted nimbly away with some apology that neither heard.

"The time was set before I came from Italy," Agatha replied, without looking up. "I have been away a long while, and my father cannot spare me any longer."

"But we are to spare you, it seems," he said, sharply. "Is no one but him to feel?"

There was no answer possible to that speech, so Agatha sat quite still.

"I am going away to-morrow for a few days," he said, abruptly; "so I shall have a foretaste of what it is like to lose you."

It was an odd thing to say; it made Agatha shiver with wounded pride, and fear lest she might have betrayed something of the agitation which stirred her very soul. She forced herself to speak then, and made her voice quiet and careless.

"Perhaps you will wander over to America, some time," she said, "and we may chance to meet."

"I shall never go back to America," he answered, in the hard tone that his voice sometimes took.

Was that said to make her understand that the story of the past weeks had come to an end? The very cruelty of the words helped to bring back her strength. The recollection of every blush that his searching glance had ever brought into her face; the half-confessions that her eyes had uttered in response to the passionate tenderness in his, rushed up and overwhelmed her with maidenly shame. But she would betray no weakness, if she died there in her seat; she should be no sign of the agony which began to darken her soul like the gathering blackness that precedes a tempest.

"I had thought it might be different," he went on, after a brief pause, "but I have my life mapped out for me now."

"Since you have done it, you must be satisfied," Agatha said; and through the whirl in her brain she could hear that her voice sounded cold and unconcerned—and she was glad.

"At all events it is done," he said; "whether by my own will or not, can make no difference now."

If madame, in her secret heart, wished the pair ever so much to fall in love, her rigid French ideas of propriety, where young ladies were concerned, would not permit her to leave them longer alone; so she came trotting out of her bed-room, with the blue silk in her hand, talking as fast as ever.

In a little while Mrs. Masterton called to take Agatha home, and as her name was announced Robert Cairn took his leave, with no other farewell for Agatha than that odd conversation they had held during the moment of madame's absence.

II.

Agatha got home and away from her frivolous relative, and alone in her own room could review the events of the past months, and through her trouble and cruel mortification, see how her beautiful cloud-palace was falling in ruins at her feet.

They only met twice after that, both times at little entertainments given Mrs. Masterton before her departure, and there was no word or look that the most ordinary acquaintance might not have bestowed. He said farewell to her when others were doing it—held her hand for an instant in his own, and added, gravely,

"Such a parting makes me understand what death is like. You will have a prosperous voyage, I am sure of that; may a long and happy life follow."

He was gone; and as Agatha Bourne watched

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him pass down the room, she knew that they had parted forever.

Then came the tedious voyage, the solitary hours, the long days and nights in which, having nothing to occupy her thoughts, they dwelt with wearisome persistence upon one theme, and nearly drove her mad with shame and anguish.

She had given her heart to this man—she had loved him; and she asked herself bitterly, from what encouragement? A few tender looks; idle words of compliment, that had seemed to her fraught with deeper meaning; from the sort of mystery and romance which her girlish fancy had imagined invested his life. It had been all the vainest, most empty gallantry on his part; she had shown that she was pleased by his attentions; it had gratified his miserable man's vanity to lure her deeper into her beautiful dreams, to see that his coming made her eyes brighten, that his whispered words could move her to the very heart; and, to add to the bitterness of her lesson, he had felt it necessary to let her see plainly at the last how she had deceived herself.

It was horrible suffering to a proud woman. When the tiresome weeks were over, and they landed in America, it seemed to Agatha Bourne that she had lived years during that season. Terrible as it was to bear the ceaseless ache at her heart, the shame and humiliation were worse. Every recollection of that time must be wrenched from her soul, or she should go mad outright—that was the work before her.

So she took up life in the home of her childhood, and bore her burden as best she could. There were seasons when even her father's affection and aunt's kindness were insupportable torture; when the friends that came about her were odious, with their expressions of interest; when the earth was a prison-house, and the blue heavens only a pitiless roof that shut out all hope.

This was her inner life; outwardly it showed fair enough, and Agatha allowed no evidence of her unrest to be visible. There were numerous visitors at the house—Mrs. Masterton and her train of idle friends, many of the most prominent people of the period—and Agatha was the center of attraction, with her beauty and wit, while every pleasure was tasteless as ashes.

There was one man oftener a guest than any other—a son of Mr. Bourne's old friend, and formerly his ward. Hugh Morland was past thirty, now; and he had lived during a period that made men develop and age rapidly. Agatha had known him all her life, and he had seemed almost like an elder brother to her. Even now his society was more agreeable than that of any human being; and though he could not have the slightest suspicion of the story which made her days one round of regret and humiliation, he seemed, oddly enough, as she often thought, to have a faculty of showing her a little light in her darkness, and through his wise, gentle counsels she came at last to understand that, however ruinous the trouble which scathed her heart, the world had not yet come to an end.

Events culminated rapidly in Agatha's life at this period. In less than four months after her return she was an orphan—her father died of a brief illness, which was hardly considered serious until a few hours before his death.

She spent the winter in the old house with aunt Dorothy, and Hugh Morland's visits were the only break in the monotony. They were pleasant to Agatha; and she grew to lean more and more upon his friendship and sympathy. She was a great heiress for those days, and when she chose to emerge from her seclusion, there would be a brilliant career before her. But the power of enjoyment was gone out of her nature—she only longed to be quiet. Any thought of returning to Europe was abhorrent to her. The slightest reference from aunt Dorothy to the season she had spent there made Agatha feel so wicked and cross that it was difficult to conceal it; and she took herself often severely to task for finding the amiable old spinster such a wearing and tiresome companion.

One night that Hugh Morland staid there, aunt Dorothy went early to bed, in hopes of forgetting a nervous headache, and the two young people were left together in the library that Agatha made her usual abiding place of an evening, in preference to the great wilderness of a drawing-room, which she pronounced unendurable, unless filled with people.

Sitting there in the stillness, Hugh Morland told her his story—the secret which he had kept in his heart so long, which he had hardly meant to tell then, though it had lain close to his lips during these months, which he knew had pressed so hardly upon her.

She was startled; the words brought her a kind of pain, too, yet it was pleasant to think there was one human being in the world who held her so dear.

"Have I frightened you?" he asked, quickly. "Was I too abrupt?"

"I had not thought of this," she answered;

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"you have been so good to me, like a kind, elder brother."

"And that is all?"

"I never thought of you in any other way," she said. "Don't be vexed with me, Hugh—I don't mean to be unkind."

"I know that, Agatha. But I have loved you so long; I think no man will ever love you better."

"I think in the whole world there can be no man whose love would be better worth having," she answered.

"Take care!" he said, tremulously; "that is almost a hope, Agatha."

"I believe I mean it for one," she said, honestly. "But I must be just to you—I must take time to think."

"And you shall have it—I will not tease you. When may I come back for my answer? See, I have to be here again in a week—will you answer me then?"

She bowed her head in sign of assent—and for the rest of the evening he was the gentle, patient friend she had always found him.

Then followed a week of solitude for Agatha; but before it ended her mind was made up. She would marry Hugh Morland; her life was so dreary and empty, and in his love she should find new hopes and interests. She haughtily shut out of her soul every thought of the past; shuddered with abhorrence at the recollection of her own weakness and self-deception, and marveled that she could have allowed herself to waste regrets over a man who had proved so mean and empty a trifler.

Hugh Morland came back to the old house, and on the evening of his arrival, when they chanced to be alone, he said, quietly,

"How is it to be, Agatha?"

She laid her hand shyly in his extended palm, and the next instant she felt herself strained to his heart with passionate tenderness.

"I thank God for giving me this new blessing!" he said, solemnly. "I will try to make you happy, Agatha. I am odd and reticent, but I shall not be so with you; and you will tell me when I am wrong—we will help each other."

"You are only too good to me, Hugh," she answered. "It is I who have a host of faults to be cured of. But there is something else I ought to tell you."

She hesitated a little, but she had decided that it was right to tell him everything about her poor little dream, and its effects upon her mind, though it was humiliating to confess that she had been duped by her own vanity, if the blame was not thrown upon the object of her romance. But Hugh listened so patiently, and helped her out in her confession so kindly, that, after all, it was not half so bitter to tell the story to him as it was sometimes to think about it. He treated the whole matter lightly—not her pain—he was gentle and sympathizing there; but he proved so convincingly that it was only a bit of girlish romance, that Agatha believed so, too, for the time, put the whole weary history out of her mind, and hoped that she had done with it forever.

Aunt Dorothy was delighted in her prim, proper way, when she was informed of their engagement; and there was no one else whom Agatha considered it her duty to consult, never having been able to give into the prevalent idea that every human being able to claim the slightest relationship has a right to meddle in one's private affairs.

The winter softened into spring, and outwardly Agatha's existence passed in its old unvarying routine. But there was a great change perceptible to herself; there was a feeling of rest and peace in the consciousness of Hugh's loving care, that kept the loneliness and coldness out of her days. What her own feelings were she found it difficult to analyze; indeed, during that season she gave herself little opportunity to do so, content to float passively on, afraid of anything which might disturb her repose. But as the months glided by, Hugh began at last to plead for an end to his term of probation.

"I want you—I need you so much," he said. "My darling, I have tried to be good and patient; I would not distress you for the world, but I shall never have rest or peace until you are my wife."

He had his way; the time for their marriage was set, but from that hour the quiet that had surrounded Agatha like a charmed atmosphere was broken up, and the old fears and unrest came back. Seldom in his society, she could banish thought then, and find repose and strength in his tenderness; but there were many days when she was alone with her troubled fancies, and the darkness grew so heavy that she was at a loss how to turn. It was difficult to talk to Hugh of her feelings—not easy to explain them to herself. She could not bring her pride to admit that the old dream still held her in its thrall—it seemed such shame to her womanhood, that she shrunk from it as from some degrading thought.

The days passed into weeks; summer blos-

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somed and died; the early autumn came—a year had elapsed since her father's death.

It was at the close of a beautiful September day that Agatha Bourne stood in her chamber gazing at her own image reflected in the mirror—looking with a sort of wonder at the unfamiliar white raiment, and the shining pearls upon her neck and arms. She was to be married that night, yet it all seemed like a dream. She had shut out aunt Dorothy and her old nurse, and dressed without assistance—she wanted to be alone. There she stood and stared at herself, and wondered if it could all be real, and grew afraid of the sudden tempest that billowed within her soul.

It was early yet, the sun was just setting; she should have a full hour to herself before Hugh, or the few guests invited would arrive. She took up a silk mantle that lay on the bed, wrapped it about her, and went down by a private stair-case which led from her room into the old-fashioned garden.

It was a lovely spot, the high wall covered by flowering vines, the autumn blossoms exhaling a faint perfume, like the breath of summer, and a solemn stillness all about, which subdued the tumult in Agatha's mind.

As she stood there, she heard her name pronounced. She could not believe that she had heard aright—often her senses had mocked her with the sound of that voice; again she heard it call,

"Agatha! Agatha!"

The next instant Robert Cairn was by her side, holding her hands in his, pouring out a torrent of incoherent words, while she stood there white as a ghost, the solid earth seeming to reel beneath her feet like a ship at sea.

"Don't you know me, Agatha?" he cried. "Didn't you believe that I would ever come? Agatha! Agatha! Say that you are glad to see me! Say that you forgive what seemed my coldness and tacit falsehood. I could not speak then, I was bound hand and foot. I have come to tell you the truth now."

The heavens seemed settling down in an awful night, through which Agatha could alone see that face; but in the midst of her despair she knew that whatever he had come to say, it was too late—she must not hear.

His head was bowed upon her hand. She could catch his tumultuous breathing as he tried to regain composure enough to speak. She had no strength to withdraw her hand—the other clutched the necklace that encircled her throat; the long mantle fell off, trailing over the ground, and displaying her white attire.

"Are you glad to see me, Agatha?" he repeated. "Let me say at once what I came to tell you—I love you—I love you——"

She drew her hand quickly away; she heard her voice, cold and stony, as if she had been dead.

"Hush!" it groaned. "Whatever you came for, it is too late—in an hour I am to be married."

Cairn started to his feet, gazed for an instant into her eyes with an agony that was like the pangs of death; then, without a word, he rushed away, not casting a single glance back.

III.

Through the mist and whirl which blurred her sight Agatha Bourne saw him go—she knew that it was forever. Never again in this world to hear his voice, to see his face! She could not bear it. Fate and heaven were too cruel upon her. The gates of Paradise had opened for an instant and closed only to leave her in a darkness more complete and terrible than that which had surrounded her during the most poignant suffering of the past.

He must go, she had no right to call him back; amid the confusion of her senses she could realize that. Yet some inarticulate words broke from her lips as she sank upon the stone bench, and shut the light out with her shuddering hands.

Robert Cairn turned; there was such confession in the drooping, despairing attitude that he would have been more than human if he could have found strength to go. She heard his step close beside her again, and looked up to meet his troubled eyes.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I ought to have gone; just a moment longer—only to hear you speak once more."

Agatha's hands dropped into her lap; she sat quiet, looking up at him with a ghost of a smile on her lips.

"It is good-by," she said, faintly.

"I can't believe it!" he exclaimed, passionately. "It must be some horrible dream."

"Only dreams come to an end," Agatha murmured, "and life goes on—goes on."

"Didn't you know that I would come?" he cried out, with a man's impatience and recklessness. "Didn't you understand that I loved you, and would come if Fate ever set me free?"

"I mustn't hear," she answered, in a voice so cold and hollow that it might have proceeded from a stone image; "you must not tell me."

"For my sake, Agatha, let me be selfish enough to set myself right in your eyes. If

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we were dead and meeting in another world, I should be free to tell you—this is like death, I must speak."

She could have borne her own pain, but not his. She would do anything to soften the despair that whitened his face.

"God remembers the living and the dead," she whispered; "try to think of that."

"I won't ask you about yourself, Agatha, I have no right; but I can't have you think me so utterly heartless and mean as I have been forced to appear. Did you believe me so, Agatha?"

"I tried," she said. "I may speak the truth now—I did try."

"But you felt that there was some reason back—some secret which would make me seem less heartless, if I could explain?"

"Yes; I felt that," she replied; "but I had no right to think! You had never told me that—that——"

"That I loved you? No; I did not dare, though it used to seem that the silence would drive me mad! I did not put it in words, but every word and look showed it; you had a right to expect that I would speak—it was more despicable than if I had broken the most solemn engagement."

"No," returned she, unable to bear that even his lips should utter such reproach of her old idol. "I was a foolish girl, unused to the world——"

"Don't!" he broke in. "I can't bear it! I say if I had done this wantonly, it would have been a meaner sin than a lie openly uttered; but I was not wicked, Agatha, only very weak! I ought never to have seen you after that first meeting, for when I left you that morning I knew already what you would be to me. But I could not stay away. Impassible as the barrier was between us, I could not deprive myself of the happiness of being near you, of hearing you speak. Oh! those weeks, those weeks!"

The very words that Agatha's aching heart had so often repeated, as she looked back through the after darkness upon that season, they found an echo in her soul now, but she shut her lips firmly and did not trust herself even to glance toward his face. She could not refuse him this opportunity of clearing himself; they must part forever: in all their lives to come there would be no second meeting; but she must let him speak now. She did not remember how much harder her burden would be to bear when his memory was freed from every doubt; she did not think of herself at all, only of him and his pain, and at any cost of suffering she would have listened.

"Do you remember them, Agatha?" he cried. "How bright they were! I would not think. I just dreamed on and shut my eyes to the end, that I knew must come."

It might have been the voice of her own heart lamenting over its beautiful vision—so many times it had uttered the same complaint. She could not speak yet, could not look at him; could only breathe a silent prayer for strength, for mercy upon them both.

"You didn't know it, Agatha," he went on, "but your own lips spoke the words that doomed me to go from you without even clearing up the secret that darkened my life."

She looked toward him now with a sort of despairing wonder in her face. Through the trouble in her brain there came the thought that, if she had done or said that which had made him believe she did not care for him, would it not be better if she could send him away now with the same belief? He might suffer less in thinking her coquettish and false than in knowing that her pain equaled his. But she could not do it; he must see the whole truth—as if they were both dead, she repeated to herself. She remembered the thrall that bound her; Hugh's patient, tender face rose before her; she would be true to her promise; but she could have no concealments from this man now.

"What did I say?" she asked. "What did I do?"

"I could not have asked your love—I would not have wronged you by asking you to share my fate—nameless, disgr[illegible] was; but at least I could h[illegible] whole truth."

"And my words k[illegible] I don't understand—I don't un[illegible]"

The sharp pain in her [illegible] would have revealed her share in his su[illegible], if she had hoped to conceal it—but she had no care to do so.

"Do you recollect what you said one day about our country—of the war—the fate that any man deserved upon whom even a suspicion rested of having proved false to his duty?"

"Yes, I recollect."

"That sealed my lips."

"You don't mean that it applied to you?" she exclaimed. "I don't believe it—I will not believe it."

"Ah! thank you," returned he, in a tone that was fuller of pathos than any tears could have been; "do not believe it! But then I was powerless to bring the slightest proof to aid my word, and in men's eyes I was guilty."

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"I should have known you were not," she cried, as eagerly as if she were defending his fair fame against some unjust accuser; "you might have trusted me."

"It could have changed nothing," he answered; "I must have seen you go just the same. If I had told you my poor story—if you had believed that I was innocent, it could not have broken down the barrier that separated me from you. I should have had no right to ask you to link your life with that of a man under suspicion and disgrace. If you had been willing, it would have been cowardly to accept such a sacrifice at your hands."

"But you came to tell me now," she said.

"Because now I have the right! Don't you understand, Agatha? My name has been cleared from the stain that covered it—I may claim it again. But when we first met, if you had heard me called Robert Rothsay, would you not have shrunk from me, and remembered the history attached to it?"

She comprehended everything now connected with his past, save the name by which his innocence had been established.

"No wonder you start, Agatha; no wonder, if you are afraid yet to believe in my honesty when I speak that name."

"I was not afraid—I do believe," she said, quickly. She was stretching forth her hand to lay it in his in token of assurance, but she remembered that she had no right; another man's kisses yet tingled on the palm: it was not hers to offer.

"I used to think nobody could," he went on, with a mournful calmness, "so I called myself by a name that belonged to my father's family, and at least was spared the shame of being denounced and spurned by any of my countrymen that I might chance to meet. It has been a long, long time to bear the load, Agatha—more than nine years that I have not heard my own name spoken; have wandered about the old world in a dreary exile, which I thought in this life could have no end."

"Poor Robert," she murmured, softly, unconscious that she had uttered the name that had grown so familiar to her lips long before.

"It was hard enough, Agatha; but, oh, my God! I did not know what pain was till now! To stand cleared before the world; to be able to speak, to find it too late!"

He broke off with a shudder, and buried his face in his hands; and Agatha crouched lower upon the bench where she had seated herself, not venturing to watch his anguish. Presently she heard his voice again, speaking with the despairing calmness which had steadied it when he began his story.

"I did not mean to say that, Agatha—I'll not complain! As the dead might talk together, that was what I told you—I shall not forget again. I want to tell you myself—you will hear it from others; but let me tell you."

"Yes, yes—go on; let me hear it from you."

"You know the bare details as the world knew them. It was said that a young lieutenant, Robert Rothsay, in the last year of the war, was believed to have held a traitorous correspondence with some of Cornwallis' officers, and to have gone over to the British lines when his scheme fell through."

"Yes, I knew that. I was always sorry for him, because the whole story seemed so vague and unlikely."

"Good, kind Agatha! Ah! I might think it was Fate that had softened your heart toward me in advance, only Fate has been so cruel to us since."

He stopped suddenly—this was but a repetition of the complaint with which he had vowed not to disturb her.

"This was the whole story," he said, when he could control himself again. "Sullivan was the colonel of my regiment, and my cousin. He hated me, because a mutual uncle, whose fortune he hoped to inherit, had quarreled with him for some misconduct, and openly avowed his intention of making me his heir.

"But he professed to be my best friend, and I, boy-like, was easily induced to trust him. He was made colonel soon after I joined the regiment, and treated me like an elder brother. He confided to me a plan by which he believed a great success might be given to our forces. But it was necessary to find some one who, for a time, would be willing to bear the odium of having deserted to the English. I can't tell you—it would be too long. I believed in his plans—I carried them out. I discovered almost at once the utter hopelessness of them, and saw clearly enough that it had only been his intention to ruin me. I succeeded in escaping to France. Sullivan wrote to me that while the war lasted he could not set me right, because of the bad effect it might have if any similar effort needed to be attempted. That was all—I lived on under the shame. The war ended. Years passed; my uncle died believing in my guilt, and leaving his fortune to my cousin. I could not come back here; could not claim my name; could only struggle on without even a hope that the future would bring any change."

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Agatha was leaning forward, her hands clasped in her lap, her very soul in the gaze she fastened on his face. As he paused, she motioned him to proceed, but did not speak.

"You came, Agatha, and went from me—but I lived! Five months ago I met Sullivan in France. I helped him when he was in great danger, but I could not save his life. When he was dying he told the truth—at least as much as would serve to leave me free from reproach. He wrote letters to leading men here, telling them that he had believed me dead, and so had neglected to do his duty before, screening his conduct as best he might; but I was glad to have him do that. There is nothing more, Agatha. I came at once to America; I landed in New York last night. I am here, and it is too late. Oh, Agatha! if you had only waited."

"I think heaven would not have it so," she answered, with a piteous quiver in her voice. "I have tried to do right—I must try still. I had to put every thought of the past from my mind—to leave it alone as I would a grave."

"But now, now!"

"Nothing is changed—don't you see? Fate has decided for us. I think we must not even talk any more—never any more in this world."

"Oh! what have I done!" he groaned, "that I should be treated so much more hardly than other men!"

"Hush! don't say that! Some time we shall know. I can't see—I can't think; but up yonder we shall understand! Try to remember that—it will help me to believe that you try."

"I will try," he said; "I promise you! If only I could have come a few months ago—only a few months. I believe you are doing right, Agatha, and yet—to save this man pain, however good and noble he may be, you break two hearts."

"They are waiting for me by this time—may come in search of me. Oh! go away—go! I am as powerless to change anything as if you had not come for a year hence."

"I see—I must go."

They stood for a little gazing in each other's face. He took her hands, held them in his own, but did not even press his lips upon them. She heard a few broken words of farewell; then once more he moved away. This time he did not look back; he passed out of a gate that led directly into the fields and disappeared.

When he had gone, Agatha walked toward the house; the ground rocked as if shaken by an earthquake; the very heavens seemed to bow, and an awful blackness gathered slowly about her, but she walked on.

She reached the steps—she was ascending them; there was a terrible rush and roar in her brain, as if the whole world had fallen into sudden ruin. She knew only that she was caught in Hugh Morland's arms, then an insensibility, that was like the blank of death, settled upon her senses.

IV.

When Agatha Bourne's soul came back from that long trance, it was deep in the night. She lay upon her bed, a shaded lamp was burning in the room; her bewildered eyes caught the outlines of two figures standing at a little distance—she recognized her aunt and Hugh. Whether moments or hours had elapsed she could not tell; she remembered everything; called out some words which brought Morland to the bed.

"You must lie quiet," he whispered. "The people are all gone—I have sent them away."

"Gone?" she repeated. "Gone?"

"Yes; try to understand—you were taken ill. The doctor is here—please, see him."

Agatha was conscious that another figure stood by the bed, conscious that Hugh lifted and supported her as she made some desperate effort for breath; then everything once more faded slowly from her sight.

When Agatha's faculties again took hold of rational, reasoning life, more than a month had elapsed. The trouble and excitement of long weeks had ended in a brain-fever, from which, during many terrible days and nights, there seemed no hope that she could recover.

But consciousness came back at length, and though she was wasted and weak, the fever had left her, and the physician pronounced that her restoration to health was now only a work of time. On the day she woke, as she opened her eyes, she fancied she saw Hugh Morland rise from his chair and disappear.

"Hugh," she said.

But it was aunt Dorothy's voice that answered.

"I thought Hugh was here," continued Agatha.

"There is nobody here but me, dear," replied her aunt.

Agatha asked for a drink. Her aunt brought it. She complained of hunger, and was allowed to eat. From that time she began to recover rapidly, and was soon able to have her bed wheeled to the window, and sit propped up among the pillows, looking out at the land-

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scape which had lost the last trace of summer, and showed bare and gray.

Hugh did not appear again, and at length Agatha asked for him.

"Where is he? I'm sure he was here while I was ill. Why doesn't he come?"

"He is down stairs," aunt Dorothy said. "He has hardly left the house since you were sick."

"Tell him to come up, I want to see him."

Aunt Dorothy went away, and presently Hugh came into the room. Agatha could see that he looked pale and thin, but his face was bright and cheerful, nevertheless.

"This begins to seem like getting well," he said, taking the wasted hand she held out to him. "This does us all so much good after these dreary weeks."

"I know how good you have been to me, Hugh," she said. "Lately I have known what was going on, though I could not speak—good, kind Hugh."

"Of course I am," he replied, smiling. "But you are not to be a bit sentimental; we are to laugh and grow fat, and be oysters at present."

She did laugh at that, though her lips quivered still.

"You see I kept them from cutting off your hair," he said, softly stroking the brown tresses that hung about her shoulders. "The doctor was crazy to get rid of all these curls."

"He always remembers everything," cried Agatha, and had to sob a little; but he talked playfully, and soon restored her composure.

For two or three days after he was in her room a good deal, but never unless she sent for him. He read to her, talked cheerfully of the slight things that would serve to interest an invalid, kept her thoughts pleasantly occupied, but never spoke a word of the old hopes, the old dreams.

She could think when alone—she had forgotten nothing. It seemed to her that she had been dead and brought back to life. She tried to shut out the past; but in spite of her efforts, her prayers for aid, the miserable unrest kept strength from coming back.

They allowed her to sit up one day, and after she was comfortably established in a great easy-chair, she wanted nurse to send Hugh. He came at once at her summons.

"Hush!" she said. "I want to talk to you."

"I thought you had been talking, every day, a good deal," he answered, smiling.

"Yes—but not that! I haven't forgotten, Hugh—you don't speak of it, you are afraid of troubling me; but I remember what was to have been the evening I was taken ill."

"We won't talk about those things yet," he said, kindly; "you are not strong enough."

"Yes, I am," she replied. "This silence worries me."

"Nothing must worry you, Agatha," returned he, tenderly; "nothing! Come, what crotchet of that busy brain must we set at rest?"

"It isn't that! Only I wanted to tell you how I appreciate all your goodness and patience, and to say that—that I have forgotten nothing—that I take back nothing."

His fingers played softly with a ring on one of her hands.

"Such a brave, true Agatha!" he murmured.

"I want to be, Hugh—indeed, I do! You'll help me, won't you?"

"With all my power, in every way that I can—you may be sure of that."

"And I shall tell you just what I think?"

"Now and always, little one."

She sat still for a moment with her face turned away; but presently she looked back, trying to smile—to be his brave, true Agatha.

"I think we must not wait, unless you are tired of me," she said, slowly. "I am very fanciful, and very silly. I don't think I ought to be here by myself. I—I would rather you took me away, Hugh."

His hand lay quiet on hers. Once more she heard him murmur, softly,

"Such a brave, true Agatha!"

"A poor, weak, useless Agatha," she said, with a few quiet tears; "but I'll do my best—you'll help me, Hugh?"

"We'll both do our best, dear—be sure of that. But are you certain you are strong enough to talk about all these things?"

"Quite. I must, Hugh. I shall never get well till everything is settled. It won't harm me; see how quiet I am."

"Wait a minute," he said. He laid her hand down, and went out of the room. Presently he came back, and sat down by her again, holding her hand fast once more. She looked at him in a strange wonder; he was very pale, but there was a look on his face such as she had never seen there, which heightened it into something higher and better than beauty.

"I am going to tell you a story," he said.

She leaned back, looking at him wonderingly.

"Yes," she said, as he seemed waiting for her to speak, "a story."

"Once upon a time, to begin as you used to

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like the fairy stories to," he went on, "there was a dull enough old student loved a young girl. He had loved her for a long time, and held his peace; but at last the time came when he thought that she might find more content in his care and tenderness than she could by herself—for she was not a happy girl, he knew that, though he could not understand what caused her trouble."

Agatha sat quiet, shading her eyes with one hand, the other still clasped in Hugh's.

"So he told her of his love, and she was willing to listen; she was patient and kind, and so brave! She meant to do right, and the man that [illegible]her knew she would be helped. So she was, but not as either of them expected. Are you listening, Agatha?"

She pressed his hand as a sign.

"You see human beings are very blind—and both the man and the woman were wrong, for all they wanted to be just and true to each other. The days and the weeks went on, and the time came when they were to be married—yes, almost up to the very hour; but there was a wisdom higher than their's yet to interpose. Then came back the true prince—the man she had really loved—a noble prince, worthy of her affection. Don't stir, Agatha—I am almost through now.

"He came, this poor prince, and told her what had kept him from her; but they both thought it was too late now to claim their happiness. In their true greatness they were ready to sacrifice it to that of the dull, old student who was better fitted to be the girl's faithful brother than her husband. So they parted, but strong as the dear princess thought herself, her heart broke, and——"

"No, Hugh, no!" she interrupted. "How did you know? I am glad you do! Try to believe me—I will do right——"

"Hush, dear! Didn't I say that you should. Let me tell my story out. The student came into the garden, and was forced to listen. After the first he knew that he ought to stay and hear it all—that God had sent him, lest he should be guilty of a great wickedness. Do you know what the end was, Agatha?"

"Yes," she gasped. "The girl kept her word—in time she would come to think of the past as the dead do——"

"That would not have been true bravery," he interrupted, gently, "though she would have meant it to be. That was not the end, little one. The prince was found, brought back to his lost idol; and it was the old student who gained a higher happiness than anything else could have given him, in bringing the pair face to face. Agatha, look up!"

The door opened. Like one in a dream she watched Robert Rothsay enter. She saw Hugh lead him toward her, felt him join their hands, heard his voice again,

"God bless you both! and God be praised for the end!"

Smiling to the last, he went away and left them together—the fairy story had become reality.

Hugh Morland lived almost up to the time in which I write; and I think I never heard of a more quietly happy life than his was. God seemed to ask nothing but that one act of renunciation on his part to make him fit for a peace and rest such as few souls are worthy to attain this side heaven.

Robert Rothsay and his wife lived long to enjoy their happiness, their wealth, their position, the love of beautiful children: and always the most welcome visitor at their hearth was Hugh Morland

When they did go away to the life beyond this, they were happy to the last in being permitted to depart so nearly together, that one could fancy Rothsay's soul waiting a few hours on the threshold of its new existence till hers was ready to follow. Hugh Morland remained, but the children of the pair for whom he had given up his youth, were left, too; and their devotion brightened his great age with a loving solicitude, such as is granted to few who are forced to linger on beyond the narrow span of years mercifully appointed to most men.

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CLEMENT MOORE'S VOCATION.
Peterson's Magazine (1849-1892); Jan 1870; VOL. LVII., No. 1.; American Periodicals
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CLEMENT MOORE'S VOCATION.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE SECOND LIFE."

From the time Clement Moore put off short dresses and pantalettes, she was set apart by her family as a genius—a genius and eccentric! She was still young, only about seventeen, when she began, as her maiden aunt expressed it, to carve out her own life; that is to say, she came to the town of Carrville, took boarding with this aforesaid aunt, converted a little shanty in the garden into a studio, and there moulded in clay and painted in oils.

There were other traits, which to women who have always run in the New York, or Philadelphia grooves, might set her apart as more noticeable than these. She could not but see for herself that she was unlike all other women that she had known. There were passions, trances, which it shamed and cowed her to name, so different were they from the thoughts of those around her. Joys and pains unutterable throbbed in her blood and racked her brain alternately; and in these joys and pains, no one, of all those she knew, could sympathize. They came to her in music, or at the sudden sight of a beautiful landscape, or through the hearing of a noble word or deed. Could she but make real these vague dreams; could she but create the beauty that moved and pained her so—give to the world something to make it glad that she had lived! The girl was wretched, or in ecstasy, by turns. To-day, her models and her pictures were lumps of clay, or meaningless daubs of paint to her; to-morrow, she could discern faint flashes of the infinite beauty gleaming through them. In her former mood, in her fits of self-abasement her manner was haughty, sullen, defiant; but in these later moods, and when sure of her God-given power, no one could be more winning or humble.

Clement was only seventeen, but she was older in some respects, and had a fuller career to look back upon than many a woman of twenty-five. There were one or two trunks full of love-letters and billet-doux in the back part of her studio; there was a disorderly mass of ball-dresses, all ripped and soiled, relics of two winters' campaign in the capital. Her flirting and waltzing had been fast and furious. "One must press the grape hard to know what the juice is worth," she was wont to say. But all this was passed and gone. She lived now as recluse as a nun.

When she walked up the village street, the women passed her superciliously. Whether she danced, painted, or studied book-keeping, her red-hot energy made her intolerable and aggressive to others of her sex. "She was like an engine," the girls said, "with a full head of steam on and the valves down." The men, on the contrary, found her exhilarating: perhaps, because they admired the moulding and pose of the large, almost majestic figure; and found mellow tints and effects which they liked in her warm skin and jet black eyes.

At the door of her studio, one evening, a man sat waiting for her. There was a wooden bench on either side of the broad flag-stone. The afternoon sun shone on it pleasantly, and a great, black walnut rustled overhead. The man, who rose to meet her, toned in well with the rich, warm picture. Clement's artist eye contracted, as it did when it was satisfied.

"Sit down, sit down, colonel," she said. "It is a relief to look at you, after three months' experience of the men here."

"They are not of your kin nor kind? I am glad, my darling." He spoke with luscious tenderness of manner.

She paused a moment; then answered, "They're lean and sallow as a rule, that is what I mean. It may be that their lineage is more scholarly than ours, or it may be the limestone water here about—I don't know."

Col. Ashby laughed, and seated himself opposite to her on the bench, the gold head of his cane to his lips, looking critically at her.

Her whims of speech never broke the summer calm of his temper. He was of a different type from the cold, careful-mannered men of Carrville. Young; with a florid, altogether masculine beauty; with easy, careless dress and manners; a good-humored smile; military walk and whiskers; thin, red skin, that hinted at choice wines in his cellar; and the air of one accustomed to command, and to give favors—Col. Ashby, the representative of one of the oldest families of Kentucky, rich, popular, a Congressman, who, young as he was, carried weight—this was exactly the man, one would have

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thought, to become Clement Moore's husband. Their world had said so long ago, at any rate; and his manner said so now, with the least bit, perhaps, of offensive fervor.

He put it into words presently. "You know why I have come, Clement?"

"Yes."

"You are my betrothed wife. For three months I have not heard of, nor from you. Even your eccentricity must have its limit."

She laughed. "I believe your good-humor has none," she said. Then she grew violently hot, and sat silent.

He would not speak, but waited.

"I knew this day would come," she said, at last. "Give me an hour to myself, and you shall have my answer. No! Not a word!" lifting her hand when he began to speak. "Nothing you can say will plead for you as my own heart does."

Clement rose, as he spoke, and walked with him to the gate, her hat in her hand, her black hair uncoiled, as usual, and hanging untidily down her neck, keeping step with his long strides. Ashby noted the mannishness and untidiness with annoyance. But it would right itself, he thought; she was a grand creature, physically, and her blood was good. None better! He was very fond of Clement, as he knew her.

"Where do you stop?" she said; for they chatted as they went, as one man would with another.

"With Shober, the judge. You know him?"

"Yes, I know him," her eyes losing expression. They lightened or dimmed, as she talked, with her passions, like a bird's or a dog's. "I hate the man."

"Yes. Shober was born antagonistic to you, Clement. I fancy he was sour, ascetic, cold in his cradle. Women can't like such men. Marriage was a mistake for him: and those four, uncouth, gangling boys live to prove it. It is a dreary house."

"It *is* a dreary house! The air is like a burying vault."

When Ashby had left her, he smiled at her vehemence. If she should carry that heat into her love for him!

Clement, when alone, locked her door, pushed the chairs out of her way, and seated herself heavily on the floor to think. Could she marry George Ashby? Once she had thought she loved him. But she was younger then. She feared now that she loved her art more. And yet a home, husband, children: she thought of it all. Custom (an iron code for most women) had its weight. All Kentucky girls of good family became engaged, and married.

On the other hand, any home, even the magnificence of George Ashby's, would, she knew, be but a jail for her. As for children, they were nothing to her but annoying animals. And, her art? She looked about her. Yet what was here that she should unwomanize herself for the love of it? People began already to stand off from her: it would not be long before she would be left alone—alone! And, perhaps, after all, her art would come to nothing.

She sat a good while with her chin in her hand, the tears oozing into her large, black eyes. Then she thought of her art again. She got up, going from picture to bust, touching one now and then, even kissing them, exactly as a mother would her children. They were the only things which had ever wakened the mother-instinct in her. Her mind was made up. She would not marry, she would live for her art.

She went out of the room, just when the pleasant evening light was changing into melancholy shadows, looking tired and faded. There were no such things as calm emotions to this girl, nor trifles; they were all matters of life and death to her.

She met George Ashby outside, and told him what she had resolved. "I shall live for my art," she said. "I think God has given me a talent, and I will not bury it in the earth."

There was honest love on Ashby's side, so far as his nature was capable of it, but he bore his disappointment like the manly fellow that he was.

"I suppose you are right, Clement," he said, bravely. "You're always right. It don't matter about me. I never knew a woman who was so fit to stand alone as you."

When he was gone, she went back and worked all night. She thought the trial of her life was past; the pain of it came afterward, perhaps.

A year or two went by. The people of Carrville saw little of Clement. No day-laborer worked harder than she. She painted steadily. "If it is to be my work for life, I must be an apprentice, not an amateur," she said, and began with the rudiments again.

I remember how we children used to hurry to one side as we met her on our way to school; how big and awkward she seemed, sweeping along with her voluminous skirt, and man's corduroy sacque; so blind to all about her, that she walked over, or literally upset us sometimes, picking us up with a "Lord bless me!" and gur-r of a laugh, in her rich, but unmodulated voice. Yet we always felt oddly

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akin to her; probably from her overgrown, unfinished look and manner, like a child suddenly developed into a woman.

She grew very pale and thin before the second winter was over, but remained always just as headlong and good-humored. Then a rumor came that a picture, or sketch, she had made, had been sent to her uncle in Baltimore, and by him submitted to some foreign artist, at that time visiting the States: who I do not know; but the authority was high and decisive. He thought the picture worth notice; so much, indeed, that he determined in his tour through the States to go down to Carrville to meet the young aspirant, and decide what course would be best for her, and whether her promise of power would warrant her giving up her life to the profession. Her uncle, old Dr. Cranmer, accompanied him, and brought him, when they arrived at Carrville, straight to Judge Shober, who had been a pupil of the doctor's in his youth.

They came at night. Early the next morning I saw Clement going up to the judge's—a bald, staring, brick house in the midst of an acre of ground. She looked sallow and ill; wore her corduroy sacque, (I noticed that,) and a brown silk skirt, with one or two tears in it, stitched with white thread. Her portfolio had been sent on before. She had a long interview with her uncle and the artist; the carriage waiting at the door, meanwhile, to take the latter to the train.

Everybody in the village, in some way, knew that her fate was to be decided in that hour; and when the two men came out, stepped into the carriage, and were driven off, we looked after the dust of their wheels with an awe-struck wonder. Art and its mysteries belonged to a world so far away from ours!

It was a bright morning in May. The sunshine fell pleasantly through the dusty, uncurtained window of the judge's parlor, where Clement stood—but it was all that was pleasant in the room—the ceiling was high, the room wide; but they offered only a larger field for the dirt and discomfort. The wall-paper was stained, the paint yellow, the carpet ragged; two or three chairs, and a stiff sofa, covered with haircloth, with the stuffing oozing out at every corner, were ranged about a square mahogany table, greasy and inky, on which lay her portfolio. There were some bookshelves, piles of newspapers, and a pair of muddy shoes on the mantle-shelf, between two vases of dirty wax-flowers. A rocking-chair, with a broken cane-seat, rocked to and fro, some one having touched it; and it gave a forlorn life to the scene. Outside was the square acre of ground, surrounded by a high, broad fence, the grass trying vainly to force its way through the clay; a heap of ashes in one corner. House and lot were the dreary camping-ground where Judge Shober, and his four sons, had lived, for the last fifteen years, without a woman to make it a home.

The door behind Clement opened, and Judge Shober came in. He went straight to the window and stood beside her, quite silent, looking out at the trodden clay and ash-heap. A tall, hardworked-looking man, with a singularly cold, staid manner.

"Have you nothing to tell me, Miss Moore?" he said, at last, speaking as a teacher might to a pupil.

Clement went to the table and took up her sketches. One might have fancied she meant, in some way, to protect herself against him by them.

"It is all over," she said.

"How?"

"I am to go to Rome. He promises me his aid there, and friends."

"Nothing more?"

"Success!"

The triumph that rose into her face, as she said this, spiritualized it, for the moment, and made it beautiful. He was silent, looking at her with a smile that grew each moment more cynical and bitter.

"In a word, you subjected yourself to this fellow to be weighed and judged for life; and after a quarter of an hour's inspection, he records his verdict as final. *I* have known you for years. I tell you that these pictures," laying his hand on them gravely, "are worthless—worthless."

"So did he."

"I tell you," angry heat rising in his thin face, "that they are crude, faulty in execution, and the idea tawdry."

"He saw it all. He was more savage in his criticism than you."

She waited for him to speak, but he stood looking at her with the same absorbing cold eyes. Her own rested on them—some secret meaning passing between them with an electric flash. Whatever it was, it shook her as with a spasm of pain. She crumpled the papers up slowly in her large hands, as they lay on the table.

"No, not so cruel as you," she said, quietly. "He tells me that I have power. God did not make a mistake when he made me. This man

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gives me a chance for happiness and fame. But you——"

"I? Well, what have I given you?"

She wiped the cold sweat from her forehead. When she spoke, her voice scarcely rose above a whisper.

"You have weighed me in your balance for years, and found me wanting. I dare to speak the truth to you at last. You have been kind to me; in your pity you have given me advice and friendship, as you gave a crust of dry bread to the beggar at your gate. Pity!" She spoke with intense scorn. "I know what I am in your eyes."

"What are you?"

"A poor creature," rising now to headlong passion. "A poor attempt of Nature that has failed; with neither the attractive body of a woman, nor the mind of a man. Oh!" she suddenly sobbed, throwing her hands up over her face. "Do you think I do not know what I am?"

He made a step toward her, and then drew back into the recess of the window, and stood silent until her passion had sobbed itself quiet. The atmosphere of dead coldness about him had long maddened the girl with what she called hate. To him she was apparently always a child, always faulty, worthy of pity.

No one in the world was barred from her by distance so impregnable.

And yet——

One time, long ago, when he had touched her hand, once when she had found his eyes fixed on her in a crowd, no one in the world had seemed so near. She had been mad—mad enough to see a real man concealed behind the quiet cynic, and to fancy that she first had discovered, and known him. If these passionate dreams came back to her now, his cool, common sense speedily banished them.

"Miss Moore!"

She dried her eyes hastily with sudden shame. To everybody else she was "Clement," to be loved, laughed at, disliked; to him she was "Miss Moore," in utter indifference. His wife had always been to him only Mrs. Shober.

"You forget the difference there is between us, when you accuse me so bitterly," he went on, speaking in his calmest, most dispassionate manner. "You are young, wealthy;" he hesitated; "other men have found you fair. You have a brilliant path before you. I did but jest when I questioned this stranger's verdict. I knew it to be just. Few women have as great strength given to them, or see as clearly how to use it."

Clement was as calm as he, as she answered, "You have drawn my life—now for your own?"

"It is patent to all men," he answered, hastily. "A man, old enough to be your father; a poor lawyer, in a poor village; for my sole duty and ambition, four sons to clothe, feed, and rear into the image of God as best I can. If life brings to you tropic fruits, she has begrudged me even the dry husks," and he ended with a bitter laugh.

Clement buttoned her corduroy coat, leisurely, before she answered him. But her fingers, which he watched with eager eyes, shook.

"Life gives us what food we choose," she said. "You offer to your friends and neighbors the dry husks, and they give them to you in exchange. You have their respect. But you are a man with whom no man, and certainly no woman, has ever walked in company."

He made no reply. He turned and looked quietly out at the sun shining on the clay-yard and ashes. When she was ready to go, he opened the door for her, following her through the ante-room into the broad hall, and out on the porch.

The house had been stately in its day—now it was shabby, commonplace, and vulgar. His boys came in from school, awkward, overgrown fellows, with cowed, slouching glances at their father as they passed him, which betrayed how stern his rule was. The eldest was about Clement's age; a warm throb came into her heart for them, perhaps some feeling which would have spent itself elsewhere, if it had not been thrust back and stifled. She would like to be a chum of theirs, she thought; a good fellow in company. They had never known a mother, never been petted, or loved. A sudden blush dyed her face. Oddly enough she was conscious, for the first time to-day, of her unclean, slovenly dress.

John Shober looked after his boys with a sorrowful tenderness, which Clement was sure he had never suffered them to see. But he said nothing. He stopped at the gate and held it open for her, standing bareheaded; the wind blew back his hair. She looked beyond him, through the gate to the barren yard and dreary house, from which came the sound of the boys squabbling.

He read her thoughts. "In Rome," he said, "there is beauty, the work for which you were born—and success. Your way lies there; here is mine."

Clement Moore went back to her studio and began to work with feverish energy. Before

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sundown pictures, sketches, outline-books, were ashes alike in the grate. "He called them worthless. I will do something worthy of his praise," she said, forcing back the tears. She packed her clothes, for she meant now to leave Carrville the next morning, although the friend whom she would accompany to Italy would not sail for a month.

"What does this haste mean, Clement?" said her aunt, standing aghast. "You had no thought this morning of going to-morrow."

"No. But I cannot stay in Carrville. I must burn my ships behind me."

Clement's words were usually enigmas to the old lady; she asked no explanation. When the little house, in which she had been so happy, was dismantled, she went into the woods beyond the meadow, and sat down by the creek.

She had pushed her corduroy sacque and torn skirt into the fire with as vehement haste as though they had been living things which had injured her. "Other men *did* think me fair," she had said again and again to herself; and she had chosen out a dress of some maroon-colored, gauzy fabric, which some one had told her once was becoming to her. "But it's too late," she said, with dry eyes. "I have been blind, blind." She put on the dress, however, and her large arms and shoulders gleamed white under it as through brown vapor. Her hair, yet wet and curly from the bath, she had gathered up in a heavy knot.

She could have cried for herself as she sat there. This little effort to be like other women seemed so pitiful to her, and so vain.

The evening grew late; the reddish color of the sky began to purple overhead; the midges thickened in the air, about the dark, sedgy banks of the creek beside her. From the village came the slow tolling of the sundown bell. The trunks of the trees were in shadow, but the branches a-top rustled green and glistening in the sunset. Clement was quite alone. She was going in the morning forever, yet nobody cared to stay with her to say good-by. Yet she was an honest creature, full of common sense, wholesome, genuine to the core; there was not an atom of sham, or caprice, of ill-nature in her; no mean little traits morticing the larger ones.

Perhaps she felt her desertion. It costs the strongest woman a wrench at heart to be alone. It may have been that which brought the strange look into her face, which never had been there before. "It is not my fault," she whispered to herself.

Presently she got up and turned through the woods homeward, crunching the bushes beneath her heavy steps. Suddenly she saw John Shober before her. He was on his way from the village, and had taken this short cut through the woods. He stood still. She stopped a moment, and then went on. Why should she not meet him? They were strangers, as they had always been.

"You are going in the morning, Miss Moore?" he said, with a smile of apparent satisfaction.

"Yes."

"Then I can bid you farewell now?"

He came up to her close, closer, and, for the second time in his life, took her hand in his.

"Good-by," she said.

"Good-by." But he held her still, looking in her eyes steadily. "You told me," he said, "that I gave you advice and friendship. You were right. Nothing more, Clement," dropping her hand. "Nothing more."

"What more?" she cried.

"Shall I tell you?" turning on her. "Did I ever mean to tell you? Do you think I was mad enough to ask a beautiful, brilliant girl, who might be my daughter, to come into that filthy den yonder, to spend her life in kitchen and housework, and slaving for my boys, because I have been fool enough to love her? No. I am a middle-aged man. I have learned common sense. I am a boy no longer." He stood motionless, and did not let her go. "But, oh! my darling, I have loved you so long!" he cried, with a sudden outburst; and somehow his arms were about her, and her warm mouth was pressed to his, which is hardly the course which common sense would have advised in such a case.

He pushed her from him at last.

"God forgive me. I never meant to trouble you. Go now."

"But if I do not want to go?" whispered Clement. The unmodulated voice was suddenly grown sweet with joy and pathos.

His passionate frenzy was over, and he was himself again—a man who knew the world, and looked at it in a stern and matter-of-fact fashion. He held his love, and this one chance of great happiness away from him, and viewed it in the same way. Yet he trembled, in his forced coolness.

"You do not know what you say. You are but a child. People would say I had cheated you into marriage in your ignorance. I am a poor man, Clement, you are wealthy."

She nodded.

"My wife's life would be a hard one. My

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first duty is to my boys, and she should not tempt me from it."

"I don't think you know your duty to your boys," in a whisper.

"Eh? I do not hear you. Do not jest, girl! This is no light matter to me. You said no woman ever had loved me; you spoke the truth more bitterly than you knew. My wife loved another man. She is dead now. But I have been alone—alone always. I thought God made you for me. But I do not forget circumstances; I am not mad."

Clement kept one hand on his arm. Her eyes sparkled with tears and mischief. "One does not wish to plead one's cause too hotly," she said, with a shy blush.

But Shober did not smile. "I do not fear the world," he cried. "But some day you may say that my passion hurried you to your ruin. You have been called to a great work, your art——"

"I think I see my work," she said, gently. "Let us walk on and talk the matter over."

One knows the end of all such reasonable conferences. Let us be rational as we will about the work of woman, and the fields suited for that work, but when love comes in, the best laid schemes will "gang aft agley."

Of course, Clement married John Shober, and to this hour has never seen Rome. But she has had no time, I fancy, to fold any of her talents comfortably away in a napkin. I remember the Shober house, a few years after she entered it; especially the ground which was added to it, and which blossomed into the quaintest, oddest fashioned of orchards and gardens. There were always the shadiest walks, the crimsonest plum-trees, and absolute thickets of roses. You generally met two or three toddling babies there—for Clement was the doting mother of half a dozen. It was the happiest house to visit in, the young people all said—and everybody visited there. The missing link, which was needed to fasten Clement to her human brothers and sisters came to her through her husband. There was no half-way measures with her, as you know. She was energetically loveable, the prudentest wife, the merriest, most tender mother, the most tactful friend. The boys, growing up to be young men, were never tired of bringing their school-mates to the house to introduce them to "mother," who had jolly little suppers for them, tableaux, charades, sudden picnics, which were something to remember for life.

John Shober grew almost into a genial companion and active citizen, after a few years of the dew and sunshine of this new life. But he never was popular as his wife was. He lived behind her, as it were; put her between himself and the outside world, showed his secret-self only to her eye.

But what did Clement do? She had been called to so high a mission, somebody questions. Did she teach her babies merely to make kites, and dress dolls?

I am afraid she spent a good deal of time at just such work. But she did something more, taught the Shober boys Latin and drawing—fitted Ben for college, in fact. They have grown up manly, high-bred fellows, with a curious reverence for God and women, which, I think, was one of Clement's old-fashioned, chivalric notions, with which she inoculated them. When her husband died, she managed the estate herself, planted and ploughed, sold and bought. "No work is unwomanly, if one is a true woman," she said.

She is content now with the work her daughters give her: they have no nearer friend than she. They suffer in comparison with her, too; for she is one of the fairest, most loveable, attractive, yet stately of matrons; her rare sense of color always shown in her beautiful dress. Now and then, a genial bit of brusquerie breaks out, and shows the old Clement.

"But your art?" was said to her, one day. "The talent was buried, after all."

Her face shone suddenly.

"My Alice has it all," putting her hand on a little fair head beside her. "It is better so. *I* had other work to do."

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A FALSE MOVE.: I.
BY E. B. RIPLEY.
Peterson's Magazine (1849-1892); Jan 1870; VOL. LVII., No. 1.; American Periodicals
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A FALSE MOVE.

BY E. B. RIPLEY.

I.

A YOUNG man of fair appearance and good manners is a valuable personage anywhere; but never more so than in a little country town. This truth was fully acknowledged and acted on by the girls in Milford; and young Edgar Holden, the head clerk in Mr. Mitchell's dry-goods store, was a lion in his way. Nature had been kind to him in the matter of personal endowments, bestowing a broad, white fore-head, bright, dark eyes, and various pleasing et cetera. Perhaps her liberality in these out-ward adornings drove her to something like parsimoniousness in the interior plenishing. His head was well enough, not lacking in sense, or shrewdness; but his heart had been fashioned after a very contracted pattern. It was large enough to accommodate comfortably just one individual—Mr. Holden himself.

The girls, however, did not suspect this, nor was he aware of the fact. He enjoyed his popularity, his invitations, and the smiles of the fair, without dreaming that he was other than an honorable, high-minded young fellow. Nor did his care for the leading numeral at once develop itself; for he fell in love, as deeply as it was in him to do, with Helen Lyndsay, the oldest daughter of a large, and by no means prosperous family.

There were two fine drygoods stores in Milford, rivals in show and business, and several minor establishments. Over the very least of these presided Mr. Lyndsay, Helen's father, assisted by an intermittent clerk. Poor man! It was pitiful to see him, year after year, growing gray and bent among his slender stock; his serious face brightening at sight of an infrequent customer, and his slow speech essaying the blandishments that should induce a purchase. But the pathos of the affair was lost on the Milfordites, among whom his store was a jest and by-word. Some sort of sales must have been made there, at intervals, to somebody, however, for Mr. Lyndsay occasionally got in a new piece of goods, and the family lived along, they hardly knew how.

As Helen grew up, affairs improved a little. She developed an unusual taste for music, cultivated by many turns and stratagems, but reaching, at least, a considerable degree of excellence. Her voice, especially, was beautiful, and went straight to the listener's heart. She was promoted to playing the organ, with a modest stipend therefor; she began to give lessons, and to be somewhat prominent in the youthful circles from her musical attainments. About this time, too, her attire was visibly brightened.

"How Helen Lyndsay has improved in her looks!" exclaimed Mary Eames, to her devoted friend, Matilda Mitchell. "In that new garnet merino she is almost handsome!"

"I don't know whether her looks have improved, or only her clothing," replied Matilda. "She would always have been pretty if she had been dressed like other people."

"Yes," said Mary, "I know. When any old, forsaken piece of lead-color, or washed-out green, had lain in the store long enough, Helen used to have a dress made from it. I wonder who selected Mr. Lyndsay's goods in the beginning!"

"Couldn't say," replied Matilda, laughing. "You must go to the oldest inhabitant for that."

But Matilda did not laugh when it became apparent that the garnet merino, or the pretty loops which it set off, had made an impression on Edgar Holden's heart. She was thought, among the girls, to be very well disposed toward her father's handsome clerk. It happened, naturally enough, that he saw her often and familiarly; accompanied her to lectures and evening meetings; and Matilda had not taken these attentions as mere matters of course. Though by no means ill-natured, she was quite aware of the difference between her father's handsome establishment, with its plate-glass windows, its lavish display, and numerous clerks, and Mr. Lyndsay's melancholy little den; she felt all the easy superiority of a girl to whom merinoes, garnet, or otherwise, were mere every-day affairs. She might have expected, too, that Edgar would have sufficient *esprit de corps* to stand by his employers. But it was not to be. Helen Lyndsay brushed back her fair tresses from her smooth brow, gave a few soft glances from her blue eyes, and the work was done. Edgar was a captive.

The sunshine of Helen's happiness bright-

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enced the whole household. Mrs. Lyndsay began to feel for her children the hopes that had long since died out for herself. "Edgar will do well," prophesied Mr. Lyndsay; "he's a young man that's bound to succeed." Success for any of its members would make a delightful variety in the family, the mother felt; and if Helen prospered, her brother and sisters would reap the comforts of it, too. Meanwhile, no heroine of romance ever cherished a tenderer, more devoted passion than warmed the young girl's heart. Edgar was so handsome, so superior, so noble—it was so generous of him, who could have had anybody, to choose her! These were her articles of faith; and in return Edgar was very fond of her, proud of her pretty face, exultant in her voice.

The first break in their felicity was caused by the offer, to the lover, of a good position in New York. He must go, that they both knew at once—it would never do to neglect such advancement. But the parting was cruel. Nothing could have consoled them under it but the feeling, on Edgar's part, that he was going to make a home for his beloved; on hers, that his absence would but bring them sooner together. He was to work, and save, and prosper, toward the one great end; while she, in her sphere, would love him faithfully, and strive to grow worthier of him every day.

II.

Helen must be allowed, of course, a little time to cry in her own room when her adored was really gone; but she soon roused herself, and came back to every-day duties. She tidied the sitting-room, kept the parlor in order, helped her mother with the sewing, and gave faithful care to her steadily-increasing class. With all this, she found time for frequent glances at Edgar's picture, and the pearl ring he had given her—how he wanted to make it a diamond!—and for reading, again and again, his precious letters.

"What shall we ever do without Helen?" Mrs. Lyndsay would say to her husband. "I am afraid to think of it."

"We won't think of it," he answered. "She is not going just yet, at any rate."

No, not just yet. For the first few weeks, while all was yet unfamiliar and even a little dreary, Edgar turned with ardor to his beloved. His letters were frequent, full of tender remembrance and fond anticipations. But as he grew accustomed to the new position, and came to feel himself a part of the vast and brilliant life that surged through the city streets, esteem for his old self and old associations grew weaker.

Almost any boarding-house can boast a pretty girl or so, and that to which Edgar's fortune had directed him did not differ, in this respect, from others. One young lady, who sat opposite him at table, especially attracted his regards. She was tall and finely-shaped, with dark eyes, and the most entire and perfect self-possession. Edgar, always sensitive to female beauty, could not but admire her well-turned waist, and the graceful slope of her shoulders. As soon as opportunity offered, he inquired her name of his landlady.

"Oh! that's Miss Minot, and her mother sits next her; the quiet, middle-aged lady, who is always crocheting tidies."

"I haven't observed," said Edgar, smiling. "She does not crochet at table, perhaps."

"That reminds me," said Mrs. Lord. "Why don't you come into the parlor of an evening? It would be so much more sociable for you; and it's hardly gallant to the young ladies to keep to yourself as you do. You'll find we have a very pleasant family. Miss Minot is a splendid girl."

"She looks it, certainly."

"You think so? Well, I should suppose you would. I don't see how any one can help it. It would hardly do, perhaps, for me to tell what she said yesterday about you."

"Hardly," said Edgar. "She, probably, did not intend that it should be repeated."

"Oh! it was no harm—but I shall be discreet." Edgar did not urge, though he would have really liked to know what impression he had made on that distinguished-looking girl. It was not unfavorable, judging from the reception she gave him, when, obedient to Mrs. Lord's hint, he made his *debut* in the parlor the next evening. Every one, indeed, met him with friendliness; the two Miss Raynors, one pretty, and the other plain, were most amiable; and their mamma, the large lady with the Roman nose, spoke feelingly of the loneliness of a young man without home or family ties in the place where business has called him. Emily Minot smiled at this tender sympathy; and Mrs. Raynor saw the smile, and felt aggrieved, all the more that the offender presently absorbed the new-comer's attention.

"How shockingly Emily Minot flirts with every man she meets," she observed to Miss Burt, a maiden lady sitting near. "I wonder her mother can let her go on so."

"She has very little to say about it, I fancy. Emily does not consult her."

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"I'm afraid not. It's sad—sad. I hope I shall never lose my influence over *my* children in that way."

Meanwhile, Emily talked with Mr. Holden. "I am not at all of Mrs. Raynor's mind," she said, smiling. "I don't consider you in the least an object of sympathy."

"Certainly not, at present. I am an object of envy, rather."

"A truce to compliments, pray; I was speaking in good faith. A man—a young man—is really to be envied. The world lies before him, he has his destiny in his own hands. So different from us poor women, who must just sit still and see what will happen!"

"You exaggerate our power, I think; circumstances control us oftener than we circumstances. And when we are strongest, most successful, we are ready to lay it at the feet of those same 'poor women,' and ask our fate from their lips."

"You can't break away from conventional prettinesses of speech, I see; but I shall adhere to my text. A man worthy the name will not hang his hopes on anything but his own will. He can make life much what he chooses to have it. But for us, there is no resource—unless we could find Aladdin's lamp."

"And what should you ask for, then?"

"More than I can tell you, at such short notice. Pomp, power, place—these are the sum. I'll spare you the details. How very warm it is!" she added, fanning herself. "Most unusual, for the season. I believe the first use I should make of my gift would be to order in a tray of ice creams."

A year later Edgar would have seen through this trick, and remained undisturbed by it; but now it seemed a charming idea to realize the naively-spoken wish. A conference with the landlady, a message to the nearest confectioner, and the ices appeared. Miss Minot beamed sweetly upon Edgar, and called Edgar a benevolent genii. Mrs. Raynor and her daughters exchanged glances; they understood the *modus operandi* perfectly. However, as the ices were there, they might as well partake of them.

Edgar's friendship with Miss Minot progressed rapidly from this evening; he was introduced to others, and soon had a circle of lady acquaintances. More or less pretty, they dazzled him by fashionable dress, by grace of manner, and "air." The image of Helen, busied with domestic cares, or going from house to house, attending to her scholars, grew less attractive. His letters were fewer, and pleaded business in excuse.

As months went on, indulgences of various sorts absorbed his means. It was absurd, he told himself, to try to save from such a salary. It did not more than keep him comfortably, alone. He had been very weak to bind himself, at his age, by any plans of marriage. Time enough for that, years hence, if he prospered. Or, at any rate, he ought to have chosen a very different sort of girl. A man's wife, if she did not bring him fortune, ought to be something in herself—should have position and connections, air and *aplomb.* He should shudder to have Miss Minot know about that horrid little store, and the music-lessons. But he had not understood his own tastes, nor his own value, in those days. It was a bad bargain—but he must make the best of it. By this time the intervals between the letters were very long. Then, little by little, the thought occurred, "Must so poor a bargain be adhered to? Were there no means of escape from it? Was a mere bit of boy's folly, like that, to hamper him all his days?" Breaking an engagement was no new thing; it had been done often enough before. So a week passed, two, three, and no letter came.

"Why doesn't Edgar write, I wonder?" said Mrs. Lyndsay.

"I don't know, mother," Helen answered.

"Perhaps he is ill."

"No; I don't think it can be that. We should have heard."

"Well, then, I must say," began Mrs. Lyndsay.

"Don't, mother," pleaded Helen. "Don't say anything. We shall know all soon enough." Mrs. Lyndsay was silent; but her heart ached for her child. And Helen looked so anxiously for a letter. Every thought, every occupation, tended toward the one event of mail-time. If her father came in at an unusual hour; if one of the children brought home a composition in its hand from school, her heart leaped up in hope that the missive had arrived at last. But nothing came.

III.

One bright morning Helen went out on her usual round; however sick her heart, lessons must be attended to. On the way she encountered Mary Eames.

"I suppose you are feeling very bright," said the latter.

"Not particularly," answered Helen. "Why should I?"

"What hypocrisy! Why, because Edgar has come, and is twice as handsome as he used to be. Isn't that reason enough?"

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"Edgar!" exclaimed Helen, turning very pale. "Is it possible—are you sure?"

"Of course, I am; I talked with him for ten minutes just now, at Mitchell's. You don't mean to say you didn't know?"

"Yes," replied Helen. "I had not heard. Good-by! I must go on."

Mary looked after her. "How strange!" she thought. "Can they have quarreled, or what is the matter?"

Helen got through her duties in some fashion, and hurried home. She longed, yet dreaded, to meet Edgar on the way; but she might have spared both hopes and fears. He was amusing himself in the Mitchell's croquet-ground with Matilda and two or three other girls.

Not without thoughts of her, however, and plans respecting his course of action. He had come, intending to see her; to have some sort of explanation; and to get back his freedom. She would give it, he was assured, without an explicit demand. But now that he was here, the affair seemed an awkward one to manage; there might be an unpleasant scene, perhaps, if Helen should not look at it as reasonably as he did. Possibly, too, her father might be indignant. So he put off the interview from day to day.

While he waited, conjecture was busy as to the cause of the trouble between the youthful pair. Mary Eames had not been slow to report her interview with Helen, and the girls were full of interest and curiosity. Matilda allowed some foolish fancies to spring up in her mind, and made herself as charming as possible. Edgar found her society an acceptable refuge from annoying thoughts; he also discerned, or imagined, a resemblance in her to his idol, Emily Minot, and admired her accordingly.

All this time Helen watched and waited at home, hoping against hope, wondering if he had heard anything against her; if he was offended, or what could be the cause of this cruel change.

Days went by, and then Edgar returned to town, without having once seen her. He had decided that it would be easier to write than speak; but writing was not easy. As well let the whole thing pass, perhaps; Helen must understand it pretty well by this time. He should like his letters, to be sure; they were silly things, and had better be destroyed—but it was no great matter. The Lyndsays were not the sort of people ever to use them against him. As for his picture, and the pearl ring, and the few other trifles he had given her, she was very welcome to them, if she cared to keep them. She did not care, it seemed. Shortly after his return, he received a packet containing all, with a few lines, requesting the return of Helen's own letters. He had felt free enough before, but acknowledged that it was, perhaps, best the affair should be formally ended.

So Helen was left to heal her wounded heart as best she might; to console herself for the destruction of her hopes, by convincing her reason of the unworthiness of their object. It was a hard task upon her. The parents, seeing her sad face, her poor little efforts after cheerfulness, execrated bitterly the cause of the trouble, but they could do nothing. She and they must wait for the effects of time.

There was now nothing in the way of Edgar's addresses to Miss Minot. A mixture of hope and uncertainty in the pursuit rendered it peculiarly fascinating to his temperament. That he was personally not unacceptable to her, he was sure; she had long treated him with the friendliest regard, which had sometimes, he thought, a tinge of tenderer meaning. But then she was ambitious; she yearned with a strong yearning after the pomps and vanities of the world. Well, there would be all the more glory in winning her, spite of these prepossessions. He did not stop to inquire whether she would remain contented after the winning; nor to justify to himself entirely the prudence of the step. That she had some means he was aware; then her connections were good, and would, doubtless, use their influence to aid her. He had hopes of advancement, too, in his own line; and then they need not marry immediately. Altogether, his plans were rather misty and confused; only one brilliant possibility, near at hand, constantly allured him—that of calling the superb woman, whom he so admired, his own. What a prize she would be! What lustre would she reflect upon him!

Lookers-on thought he had a fair chance of success; even Mrs. Minot, quiet and indifferent as she ordinarily was, grew uneasy.

"My dear," said she, timidly, "have you thought of all it would involve to marry this young man?"

"No, mamma, I haven't felt any call to think of it. Is it possible," she added, laughing, "that you know so little about your own child as that?"

"Well, Emily, I could not tell how it might be. He is very good-looking, and you are so much together."

"And I have a weak head, likely to be turned by good looks and by propinquity! Thank you for your high opinion! I am not infatuated

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enough, however, to marry a clerk on a salary, just yet. He's good-looking, as you say, and a very creditable attendant, and convenient in the way of bouquets, and carriage-hire, and concerts. There his vocation ends, so far as I am concerned."

"But do you think he understands it? Are you sure you are not misleading him?"

"He ought to; I have told him my views of life a dozen times. If he mistakes me, it is his own affair."

Thus tenderly did Edgar's idol treat his pretensions in the candor and privacy of her own family. To be sure, she used a little more ceremony when discussing them with himself a few days later; but the result was the same. He had been encouraged by an unwonted softness in her manner, and favoring circumstances of time and place, to speak his mind; and she had rejected him unequivocally, with many expressions of surprise. She had supposed they understood each other, that only a pleasant friendship existed between them. She was profuse in regrets, and hoped to retain his esteem. But Edgar's eyes were opened; he saw that she had chosen to amuse herself without one consideration for him, and he was bitterly indignant. If the image of Helen, perfect in her devotion, rose to his remembrance, we will not pity him too much for whatever was painful in the contrast. Longer reflection only confirmed his opinion. He recalled very clearly Miss Minot's acceptance of numerous little favors; nay, more, the hints she had given, which he had been so pleased and proud to act upon; and he did not doubt that he had been duped and freely used for her convenience. The conviction was not flattering to his vanity; perhaps, no injury to his heart alone could have so rankled.

In the very midst of this bitter and mortified feeling came most surprising news from Milford. Mr. Lyndsay's parents had died some months before, leaving to him the homestead farm. It was not a very desirable property, and there had been some delay in finding a purchaser. Meanwhile, oil had been discovered in the neighborhood, and speculators besieged Mr. Lyndsay on all hands. Fortunately, as it proved, he disregarded their temptations, got together all his available means, and began to bore. There was a brief period of great anxiety, followed by delicious exultation. At a comparatively trifling depth a flowing well burst forth; the fortune of the family was made. Adieu to the melancholy little shop, the music-lessons, and the small economies! Henceforward their path lay among the sunny places of life.

It was hard on Edgar, that any one must admit. I cannot tell you how tenderly the memory of Helen recurred to him, now that he knew her to be an heiress, surrounded by all the luxuries he doated on. If only he had kept faith a few weeks longer! Sometimes he half-meditated going back and pleading his cause again, but a certain instinct of failure withheld him. Like most of us, prone to attribute his own faults to other people, he lays the blame of the affair on Emily Minot. If she had not been so vain, coquettish, hungry for conquest, all would yet be well.

On Saturday afternoon the wholesale stores close early, and Edgar, in common with hundreds of others, seeks the Central Park. Wending his way modestly on foot, he sometimes meets the Lyndsay carriage, and glances, unrecognized, at Helen, bright in recovered cheerfulness and beauty. How near, yet how unattainable! And he might have sat there by her side, might have shared in every luxury, every splendor! Nothing but his own act prevented it.

No wonder that he walks home rather dejectedly, and finds his boarding-house an uninviting home, and its inmates sadly deficient in refinement. Of course, the world is not over for him yet; but he feels, with reason, that the highest prize is not likely to fall twice to his lot. And any moderate success he may yet achieve will always be embittered by the thought of that one false move and its consequences.

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"KITTY CLOVER."
BY MRS. CARRIE D. BEEBE.
Peterson's Magazine (1849-1892); Jan 1870; VOL. LVII., No. 1.; American Periodicals
pg. 73

"KITTY CLOVER."

BY MRS. CARRIE D. BEEBE.

WILLARD Ross sat in the parlor of his uncle's farm-house, lazily turning the leaves of a photograph-album.

"Who is this, aunt Mary?" he asked.

"Oh! that's Kitty Clover!"

"Kitty Clover?"

"Yes; or Kitty Armstead, rather; my niece. She spent a month here last summer, and your uncle David thought so much of her that he asked for her picture. He always calls her Kitty Clover, because she thinks clover-blossoms are so pretty."

"Where does she live?"

"In New York."

"Tell me about her, won't you?"

"She is my sister's youngest child, and her father is dead; her sisters are all married, and she lives alone with her mother."

"She is quite a belle, I suppose."

"Well, I hardly think so; she isn't rich enough for that."

"Is she poor, then?"

"No, not that exactly, either. Her father was a tea-merchant, who died a few years ago, leaving a small property. Kitty and her mother have enough to rent a neat second-story house, and feed and clothe themselves comfortably. She is coming up again this summer, and I am very glad, for I know you will like each other, and it will be pleasant for both."

"How old is she?"

"Eighteen. Just the age for you. A man, with your wealth and position in society, ought to be married."

"The truth is, aunt Mary, that all the marriageable young ladies have turned fortune-hunters. If I could meet your niece without her knowing that I was rich, it would suit me well, for I like her face exceedingly."

"Now don't be so ridiculous, Willard! Kitty might, with just as much propriety, say that she was afraid you would fall in love with her on account of her beauty, and insist upon wearing a mask. You are not in search of a rich wife, for the very excellent reason that you are wealthy yourself. But the woman you marry must possess beauty, or its equivalent; and I think it is but fair that she should receive something in exchange."

"So you think I have nothing but wealth to recommend me, aunt Mary?"

"Yes, I think you have an abundance of self-conceit."

"Now that is unkind. You are angry with me for suspecting your niece of mercenary motives. Do be a good, kind aunt Mary, and help me in this."

"I cannot say that I approve of deception under any circumstances. Still, if you really desire it, you might pretend to be a distant cousin, assisting your uncle through the summer work, and treated as one of the family on account of the relationship."

"That is just the thing; for I am so brown already that I could easily pass for a farmer."

That very night Mrs. Ross received a letter from Kitty, saying that she would be there the next day; and Willard hastily prepared himself, and gave instructions to the servants.

So the next evening when his uncle David rode back from the village, with Kitty in the carriage, Willard was coming from work with the men.

He was more than surprised at Kitty's beauty, even after having seen her photograph. Her bright, waving golden hair; her fair complexion; and her brown, sparkling eyes, that seemed overflowing with mischief, far exceeded in loveliness all he had imagined. But, unfortunately, Kitty's attention was directed to household affairs for the first few days, and she took little or no notice of him.

But one day she went out into the hay-field with her uncle, when Willard was on the mowing-machine mowing. The horses were quite spirited, and coming suddenly to a hollow in the ground, he was thrown off the mower, spraining his ankle slightly.

This proved sufficiently painful to keep him in the house for the next few days, and Kitty and he became the best of friends. She read to him, talked and sang to him; and as they were both disposed to be argumentative, aunt Mary was often amused by their discussions.

"How did you acquire such a finished education, and a thorough knowledge of books?" asked Kitty, one day.

"Ah, Miss Kitty! my father was once wealthy, and no pains was spared with my education."

"Why don't you use it to some advantage?"

"Perhaps I may do so some day, though, to tell the truth, I believe I am rather indolent."

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One morning, as soon as the dew was off the grass, Kitty ran out and gathered flowers for the vases. She sat down on a low chair in the parlor to arrange them.

Willard watched her, thinking what a lovely picture she made in her white morning-dress, and her hair more like gold than ever. He asked for a nosegay.

"Certainly," she said. Taking a white rose, she surrounded it with forget-me-nots, added some sweet elysium, and tying fragrant geranium-leaves around the whole, she placed it in his hand.

"It is beautiful and sweet—it is like yourself," he said, enthusiastically.

Kitty blushed hotly, but made no reply.

"Let me see what messages they bring me. 'I am worthy of you!' 'True love!' 'Worth beyond beauty!' and 'Preference!'"

"Ah, sir! that is unfair! I selected the flowers for their beauty and fragrance, not for their meaning." And Kitty's proud, little lips curled; she tried to appear angry and disdainful, but she looked more perplexed than either; for the white lids, with their golden fringes, drooped over her brown eyes, and her slender fingers fluttered nervously with the flowers in her lap. Hastily placing them in the vases, she escaped to her room, and did not make her appearance until dinner-time. Willard watched throughout the meal to catch her eye, and was at last rewarded with a timid, fluttering glance. He sent back such a look of entreaty, mingled with penitence, that her cheeks grew very rosy, though she did not deign to notice him further.

She did not appear in the parlor after dinner; and he began to fear she was seriously offended.

"I wish, most ardently, that I had never assumed this silly disguise," he said; "it places me in a false position, that is often uncomfortable; and I verily believe that this provoking sprain, which I thought might possibly excite her sympathy, has only caused me to appear more worthless and inactive in her eyes."

He heard her light step on the stairs, but she went directly out on the porch. He called her, and she came in, looking a little frightened.

"Miss Kitty, I see I have offended you. I did not mean it. Pray, forgive me."

His tone was so humble that she gave him her hand in a pretty, graceful way. He took it in both his, and kissed it repeatedly, and passionately.

She flushed angrily.

"I cannot help it!" he cried. "Oh, Kitty! I love you!"

"But I don't love you, sir!" she said, half vexed, half saucy.

"But you are not angry with me for loving you?"

"No. I want to be your friend, and I don't want you to make love to me."

"Please, don't leave me alone; my ankle is very painful—aren't you sorry?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"Won't you read to me, then?"

"Certainly! What would you like?"

"The Princess."

"But I am tired of that."

"I can never tire of it—but please yourself."

"I will read it to you."

She took the book and sat down, the blue and gold making her fair hand whiter by contrast. Her tones were silvery sweet; her face flushed softly as she read, and, at the last words of the prince, her voice trembled slightly. She closed her eyes and sat slowly rocking to and fro, her hair floating out in the sunshine that came through a western window.

He watched her, thinking how beautiful she was, and how he loved her; and yet he dared not speak after what had passed.

But a few evenings subsequently, his love proved stronger than his judgment; and as they sat in the twilight shadows, he told her that old but bewitching story, and she grew paler as she listened, and for answer said,

"Willard! Willard! you must not love me, for I cannot be your wife!"

"Kitty, do you refuse me because I am poor?"

"Oh, no! but you lack energy, ambition. If you were rich, there might be more excuse for your idleness; but a man with your health, education and talents, should never settle down to a second-rate day laborer."

"Aunt Mary has betrayed me!"

"What?"

"Kitty!" he said, springing up, "do you know who I am?"

"No; but I believe you are a lunatic!"

"I am not; but I will acknowledge that I have been a fool! Kitty, my name is not Smith; I am Willard Ross!"

She started in surprise. But recovering herself, in a moment, she said, rather coldly.

"I thought Willard Ross was a wealthy lawyer, residing in the city."

"I am he."

"But why did you take the name of Smith?"

"I knew you were coming, and I thought—"

"Oh, I see! You thought I would fall in love with your money? That was extremely sagacious on your part."

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"No matter what I thought. I am sorry that I assumed the disguise. I love you: how much words fail to tell. Oh! be mine, Kitty?"

As he spoke he tried to take her hand, but she drew back.

"No, sir," she said; "not after such deception. Mr. Ross, good-night."

Willard flew to aunt Mary for comfort. She soothed him as best she could, assuring him that she believed Kitty did love him, and had only refused him because her pride was wounded. Still, he spent a sleepless night. Kitty, too, looked pale at breakfast; Willard thought so, at least; and it gave him a forlorn hope. But she avoided him that day, and the days that followed. Yet she glided about the house as silently as a spirit, with neither songs nor laughter on her lips.

Willard watched her with an aching heart, thinking that he could almost give up the hope of winning her love, if it would make her the mirthful, happy Kitty once more.

"If I had only taken aunt Mary's advice at first," he said. "I'm sure I don't blame the dear child for refusing such a worthless mortal as I represented myself to be."

One afternoon he rode to the village for the mail. Kitty had been out for a short walk, and came in, complaining of headache.

"Lie down on the sofa, dear," cried aunt Mary; "there is no one to disturb you, and, perhaps, you may fall asleep."

She brought a pillow, and Kitty laid her tired little head upon it, and, as everything was quiet, she was soon away in the land of dreams.

Aunt Mary met Willard at the door on his return. "Kitty is asleep in the parlor," she said; "go in, if you like, but don't disturb her."

So he went in softly, and drawing an ottoman near the sofa, he sat down beside her. She looked very lovely in her graceful slumber; attired in white, her hair fastened away from her forehead with a pale-blue ribbon, and the tip of a tiny blue slipper peeping out beneath her dress. Her fair hands lay lightly, "palm to palm;" but his heart reproached him when he saw how pale her face had grown. He dared not kiss her, but took a curl of her hair softly in his hands, pressing it to his lips silently.

By-and-by she began to murmur in her sleep. Willard started, when he heard his own name spoken softly and lovingly. His heart gave a great bound of joy. But he was a man of honor, and remembered that he had no right to be there, listening. So he rose noiselessly to leave the room.

The movement, however, awoke her, at least partially. She looked up, and met his eyes, gazing fondly on her. She was still only half conscious: at least she had not yet had time to remember her pride; and she smiled in return, and held out her hand.

Willard seized it, covered it with kisses, and fell on his knees beside her.

The crimson blood rushed over the cheeks, the brow, even the fair neck of Kitty; for suddenly she recalled everything, and especially her pride.

But it was too late. Willard held fast to her hand.

"Don't be cruel again, darling," he began.

Kitty burst into tears. But when he drew her head to his shoulder, she resisted no longer. She hid her face, but he kissed her hair.

"You love me, don't you, Kitty?" he whispered, at last. She looked up, shyly; their lips met: and Kitty was won.

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VIOLA'S FIRST VALENTINE,
BY MRS. M. A. DENISON.
Peterson's Magazine (1849-1892); Feb 1870; VOL.LVII., No. 2.; American Periodicals
pg. 111

VIOLA'S FIRST VALENTINE.

BY MRS. M. A. DENISON.

WE were very poor. My mother was a widow. Her health had been failing for months. At last she took to her bed, just as the winter began.

One night I sat by her, watching anxiously the pale, wan face.

Suddenly she cried, "Viola, get up, the lamp is out. Light it and give me some water."

I was quite startled, for I saw the little night-lamp burning as brightly as ever. However, I arose, picked up the wick, and hurried for the water.

"Do light the lamp, dear," she said again.

"Mother, darling!" I said, kissing her lips, and, oh! how cold they were! "the lamp is lighted—don't you see?"

"Then it is death, death!" she murmured; and there came a fearful silence. For some time I could neither speak nor move; then, with shrill, frightened cries, I roused the people in the house where we lodged. This was my introduction to an orphan's lot. I will not dwell on the first fifteen years. At last I found a home that was, in some respects, congenial. I was called to be the nursery governess of two children, the motherless, twin daughters of Mr. Stanhope, an eminent lawyer, who lived in a lovely villa just out of New York.

What a change for me! The nursery was a noble room, full of grand, old furniture and lovely pictures. The twins' bed, with its lace curtains, and my own little couch in a recess of the wall, looked really fairy-like. There were wide, pleasant windows, arched at the top, with deep seats, in which we three sat, all children together, and watched the gray, old gardener trim the shrubs, or fine equipages dash along the near highway, or brilliant orioles flit through the emerald leaves of elms and oaks.

And there was the stately housekeeper, a beautiful woman still, who never seemed so happy as when she was talking of Mr. Stanhope.

"You see, my dear, what a good man he is, and so very, very fond of the memory of his dear wife. She has been dead exactly seven years; and he religiously keeps the anniversary of her death, and always will, I think. It is a year since he went away; he is in Europe, you know, and we expect him next month."

We were sitting, sewing, by the front window, as she spoke. Suddenly she looked out, and exclaimed, "Heaven preserve us! Here is Mr. Stanhope himself! Why, he must have come by an earlier steamer than he intended."

Such a noise and hubbub as ensued! Such hearty shaking of hands, and exclamations of surprise! Soon little Grace cried, shaking me by the hand,

"Oh, papa! here is our teacher. Kiss her, dear papa; we love her ever so much."

I was so confused, I could not even look up.

"Hush, my dear!" said the housekeeper, in a strange voice; "gentlemen only kiss their little daughters. I ventured to engage this young person, sir," she continued, "on good recommendation. She has been very faithful, and Gertrude and Grace seem to love her dearly. Viola, look up; this is Mr. Stanhope."

I raised my head shyly, and encountered two dark, shining eyes beaming down upon me. Something in their surprised, pleased expression affected me agreeably, and made me less afraid; but, as I turned away, I caught sight of the housekeeper's face, and it turned my blood to ice. Her glance, so full of malice, of sudden, deadly hatred, troubled me, haunted me. I could not understand it: later I learned to do so.

The next day, and the next, I saw Mr. Stanhope, and could look at him without blushing, and speak without stammering. Every day he

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would take the children in the garden, and play with them as if he were a boy himself; and he came into the nursery, sometimes, when they were repeating their simple lessons.

Three blissful, happy years fled rapidly; I was growing tall, and losing my awkwardness. I idolized the children, and should have been perfectly happy, but for one thing. The housekeeper seemed constantly to watch me. She affected to be my friend, to counsel and to aid me. She often gave me advice, told me how poor I was, and how humble I should be; cautioned me to beware of Mr. Stanhope, and not be giddy and childish in his presence; gave dark hints that invariably frightened me into a headache.

"You are subject to headaches," she said, one day, with a sneer, when I was suffering. "I know how to relieve you."

"How? Tell me," I said; "it is such terrible pain. I will do anything to be rid of it."

She came close beside me, and gathered up the masses of golden curls that fell on my neck.

"Cut off your hair, child," she said; "it is killing you;" and she reached for her scissors.

Suddenly the secret of her manner dawned on me. She was jealous of me. She loved Mr. Stanhope herself! Her eyes flashed fire as she saw I knew her secret.

"Oh! you think yourself a paragon of beauty, I can see," she cried; "you wish to keep your long ringlets that you may mesh them about *his* heart. Yes, yes, you think your bright eyes will ensnare him. What! a beggar, of whom one knows nothing, daring to aspire so high. Do you suppose, poor fool, that he loves you?" She laughed scornfully. "On the contrary, he sees that you are infatuated with him, and despises you."

Just then, one of the house-maids opened the door, and handed me a large envelope, which, she said, had come from the post-office that moment. I opened it, in some surprise, for I knew no one from whom to expect a letter. A picture, coarsely colored, was inside. But my eyes were so blinded with tears of mortification and anger, at what the housekeeper had said, that, for a time, I could not make out what it was. Then I saw that the rough wood-cut, painted in glaring colors, represented a girl, with one of the most vulgar faces I had ever seen, but with hair the exact hue of my own, standing admiringly before a mirror. Under the picture was written, "Miss Viola's Portrait."

A mocking laugh interrupted me. I turned and saw that the housekeeper had been looking over my shoulder.

"I give you joy of your Valentine," she cried; and I recollected, for the first time, that it was the fourteenth of February. "I know who sent it, too; it was Mr. Stanhope: he told me he intended to, for your airs needed taking down." And again she laughed mockingly.

The letter fell from my trembling fingers. I covered my face with my hands, and rushed wildly from the room.

Do you wonder at my agony and shame? Or that, when I reached my own apartment, I fell writhing to the floor? Pride, mortification, all the noblest passions of my nature were contending together. I, so trusting, so innocent, to be treated thus! to be told, in so coarse and insulting a way, that I was despised and ridiculed.

Hours after, I kissed the children as they slept, gathered together a few needful things, and then knelt down to pray for my two darlings, and for all who had wronged me. Long I listened for the stroke of the midnight hour. Then, when I knew the house was silent, that every one was asleep, I stole noiselessly down stairs, and left by the servants' door at the side.

What was it that impelled me, however, instead of moving straight down the lawn, to go round to the front of the house, to stand upon the porch, and there to take one last farewell look upon the scenes I loved so dearly? I can never tell. But I obeyed the impulse, and while I stood there, the library-window opened softly, and out stepped the master of the mansion, standing full in the moonlight, and looking straight in my face.

"I heard steps," he said. "I was up late, and—— Why, Viola, is it you?"

I made no answer, but stood trembling. I thought I should fall.

Suddenly he saw my bundle.

"What does this mean, my child?" he said. "Were you going away, and in this manner?"

His tones were so soft, so full of sympathy, his manner so tender, I was staggered. Could the housekeeper have told the truth? Surely, one who spoke thus, and with so tender an inflection, could not despise me. I hid my face; I seemed to myself, all at once, the most ungrateful of earth's children.

"Do we not treat you well, Viola?" he asked, moving a little nearer.

At this I burst into tears. Losing all self-command, I sobbed, "I thought you jested at

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me, despised me; boasted that I——" my voice failed me.

"How could you think so unjustly of me, Viola?" he exclaimed, in somewhat agitated tones, moving still nearer. "Who has deceived you so shamefully?"

I hesitated, but he insisted, and finally I told him all.

"How cruel!" he murmured, taking my hand. When he spoke again, it was with emphatic earnestness. "I sent no Valentine. The housekeeper must have sent it herself. So far from boasting that you loved me, Viola, I never dared to hope that one so young, so beautiful, so good, would think of me at all. Why, I am old enough to be your father. And yet," and his voice grew even softer and more musical, and he stopped abruptly.

I stood trembling, overwhelmed with astonishment, unable to speak.

"Yes, Viola," he resumed, after a moment, pressing my hand, "gladly would I call you mine, if I dared to hope so much. The wealth of a pure, glad heart like yours, is all I ask. Viola, do you think you could learn to love me?"

The next moment I was folded to his heart, and though I sobbed wildly, I felt that my troubles were over for life.

When I woke, the next morning, after the deep sleep that followed the exhausting emotions of the night before, it was quite late. The moment, however, my eyes opened, there was a rush of little feet to my bedside, and Grace and Gertrude climbed up, and throwing their arms about me, kissed me.

"Old Crusty"—this was what the children called the housekeeper—"Old Crusty went away this morning," said Grace. "Oh! ain't I glad!"

"And papa says you are to be our new mamma," added Gertrude, nestling close to me.

"Our new mamma! Our new mamma!" shouted Grace, and jumped down, and began to dance about the floor.

I heard, afterward, that there had been a terrible scene between Mr. Stanhope and his housekeeper, and that, long before I woke, the latter had left the house, with all her trunks, in a rage that was described as frightful.

What more have I to tell? Grace and Gertrude are growing up, as sweet daughters as any mother could ask, and my dearest friends. Mr. Stanhope loves me "better and better every day," he tells me. I have never had another Valentine. The one sent by my enemy was both my first and my last.

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AT THE END OF FIVE YEARS.
BY FRANK LEE BENEDICT.
Peterson's Magazine (1849-1892); Feb 1870; VOL.LVII., No. 2.; American Periodicals
pg. 114

AT THE END OF FIVE YEARS.

BY FRANK LEE BENEDICT.

Miss Jemima Denby wrote a long, characteristic letter to Laura Herford, and I shall give it here because it will explain the little story I want to tell.

My Dear Laura—So you are back from Europe, after five years of wanderings, and still you are plain Miss, in spite of all the fine things we have heard and read of your being about to marry Lord This, or Marquis T'other.

The last report was, you were to take young Count T——, and now he's going to marry a Boston girl. Bless me! do you mean to be a hardened spinster like myself? Well, I can't blame you; the men are not what they were, and they were always worth little enough—they would be the most absurd of created creatures if there were no women.

But I had a reason for writing, and if I don't make haste and tell it I shall forget. I want you to come to Beechfield at once. I have invited a party of the young folk of your girlish days—you must come. I don't invite your aunt, because she and I have a pleasant hate of thirty good years between us, and we should be sure to come to blows if shut up in the same house. She's a dragon—so am I; let's howl, each in her own jungle.

My niece and her husband, your old friend Cicy, have bought a place near me. My dear, Preston Everett is a jewel, and he's married, so you can flirt with him. By-the-way, one of your old beaux, Fred Voorhies, is with them—he's been in California for an age. They used to say you were fond of each other; so you had better come, or I shall think it was true, and that you are afraid to see him. Now you are vexed, that's what I wanted.

So you are a beauty acknowledged—the emperor said so! Well, well, when you were thirteen, people said your hair was red—I knew it was just the tint you see in Venetian pictures—and now that blondes are the rage, other folk have found it out.

As for your emperor, I knew him ages since in London. Yes, indeed; and I told him once he had the most atrocious nose ever put on a man's face; and Count D'Orsay laughed. The prince hadn't a word to say for himself; and, I'll warrant you just from that, he remembers me—men always remember a woman that scratches them; and, I thank heaven, I've done my duty in the way of saying unpleasant things to people.

Now, come at once and show your new dresses. Old Jemima Denby.

Miss Herford was still in town when she received her letter; and very much bored she was, for she had a troop of relations about her, and the weather was getting very warm. The trees in the Park looked as if they had put on brown Holland shrouds; and Murray Hill was a desert of dust, not sand.

Yes, she would go to dear old Miss Denby. It would be pleasant to see the places, and the people she had liked when life was fresher than it looked now, and Miss Gem's highly-spiced speeches would be an agreeable contrast to the incessant adulation she had received for a sufficient length of time to make it wearisome.

What did she mean by that mention of Fred Voorhies? Had the ridiculous people been saying she still cared for him, and Miss Gem had taken that way to give her a hint, that she might silence their tongues by appearing among them in all the gorgeousness of her power?

But, after all, what was the gossip of silly heads to her? Still, she would go—it would be a relief to be free from her worldly old aunt for a time; then she reproached herself for that thought. Yes, actually she would like to see Fred Voorhies; Laura, the woman, would like to look at the man whom Laura, the girl, had loved, or the reality of what was her ideal.

"I dare say," said Laura, to herself, "that though the man has been nothing to me for years, in some absurd way that old dream has stood between me and common sense. I really ought to marry! I'll go and look at the dead things of the past, then I'll come back and be sensible. I ought to marry Mr. Lenox—I should like to be an ambassadress. Oh, dear me! I love nobody and nothing!"

All the people were out on an expedition when she reached Beechfield, so she had a comfortable rest, and a quiet dish of tea in her room; and then in came Miss Gem, looking as young as she did when Laura was a tiny girl and one of her prime favorites.

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"Humph!" said Miss Gem, after they had talked awhile. "You are in the bored stage—the surest proof you've had an awful amount of adoration. You're very handsome, but you look too indifferent. Why, you're just in the mood when even new dresses are a weariness. Well, you'll get over it."

"Shall I?" Laura asked.

"Yes, people get over everything! I've been bored myself—dreadful it was; but look at me now! Bless me! I'm too busy—I'm ruling people, or I'm bothering people, or I'm setting people straight, or I'm subduing my relations, or I'm hunting up a language new to me, or I have a geological fit, or a botanical spasm. Oh! there's always something."

"Is there?" asked Laura.

"You'll find it! Bless you, you think you've lived it all out. Oh! you've oceans to learn yet! But I'm glad to have you here! Do as you like. All I ask of my guests is to be in the drawing-room by half-past seven, so I needn't be kept waiting for my dinner."

And then they laughed, and Laura felt herself getting more life, just from the mere sight of wonderful old Miss Gem, who was the grandest old maid that ever lived.

As there was a party, dinner was not till eight that day; and as Laura had a gloomy fit come over her after Miss Gem's departure, she did not take the trouble to go down stairs till nearly the hour.

There were some twenty people gathered when she appeared; and, of course, everybody was looking at her—and she was worth it! She wore a marvelous dress, and looked like a goddess!

Up came old friends and new people, and it was a repetition of the story Laura was so tired of; and she heard foolish things, and said lazy things, and wished it was bed-time.

And presently she saw Miss Gem talking to a man who had just come in—a tall, pale man, with a long, brown mustache, and great, brown eyes, that were handsome, and would have been handsomer if they had not looked gloomy and tired, and a wonderfully thorough-bred look altogether, and she knew it was Fred Voorhies; but how he was altered!

She had expected him to be changed, but not in this way. He had been buried in the mountains, down by the Pacific, busy drawing a fortune out of a Nevada silver-mine. She had made up her mind to see him a little coarse, a little fussy, perhaps; already very fond of good things to eat, for he was thirty; and here he was cold, and bored, and elegant still.

They were going toward the dining-room before he happened to be near her, or was apparently aware of her presence. Then she held out her hand quietly, and said,

"I believe we need no introduction, Mr. Voorhies. I am very glad to see you."

"I am very happy to welcome you back," said Fred Voorhies, bowing low over her hand.

They were not near enough each other at table to talk, and Laura saw fit to talk a great deal to those about her in her most languid and heartless manner; and Fred Voorhies, down at his end of the board, was making the people laugh by stories of camp life, and was as brilliant as possible; and Laura, catching words occasionally, tried to think he was coarse, and did not succeed.

After dinner, she did not see much more of him; for pretty little Mrs. Lambert took possession of him. Laura talked and laughed, and made new victims enough to have satisfied any reasonable creature; but the evening was as dull to her as such evenings had been for a long, long time.

That night, when she was alone in her room, Laura wondered how, as a young girl, she could ever have been foolish enough to let a girl's dream and a girl's fancy become so powerful. Fred Voorhies was the merest trifler, she said, a man who lived on the surface of existence, and was content so to do; whose innate, well-bred, and very probably good-natured selfishness, made him avoid earnestness in any form.

"It would have been all the same, then," said Laura, "whoever the man might have been. I had to dream my dream and live my romance—girls are such idiots! The first man, with a handsome face that came in my way, I naturally concluded was the reality of my ideal—a beautiful one I chose, and a blessed young donkey I was. Well, I shall never be in love now; it is altogether too late," and Laura felt several centuries old, at least: "and I must marry—I think that's rather a bore; but, then, everything about life is a bore."

Then Laura decided to go to sleep, and told herself she was doing it for some time; and at last discovered she was telling a lie, for she was broad, staring awake, and, in spite of herself, feeling hot and wrathful toward Fred Voorhies, because he had altogether beaten her at her own game of elegant indifference.

And in the same clear, yellow moonlight, Fred Voorhies sat by his open window at an hour when a reasonable man ought to have been in bed, and smoked a great deal of the very strongest golden leaf in his biggest meer-

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schaum—what he called his storm-pipe, which was reserved for restless seasons like this.

"And the woman is just what the girl promised to be," he growled, internally. "A mere specimen of airs and breeding—a regular fine lady," thought Fred. "Bah! I hate the species! Yet how I did love that girl! Well, it's all over, and when a woman makes a fool of me again, she'll be keener than any of the race I'm acquainted with."

Up rose Fred, shook the ashes out of his pipe, knocking it with unnecessary violence on the window-sill, and uttering a single ejaculation aloud, not at all complimentary to women in general. Then he went to bed.

Finally, the next day came, and all the Beechfield party were over at the Everett's place for luncheon. After that there was to be an expedition through the woods to the top of Eagle's Bluff, which was one of the show places of the neighborhood.

Laura Herford, and such of the women as knew they could manage to walk about a house in a habit without looking absurd, had come on horseback. No, there was one woman who looked absurd, and did not know it—a bony, high-shouldered, giggling, ringleted old maid. Miss Gem always invited one silly specimen of the race as a foil to herself, she frankly owned. Laura looked like a queen on horseback, and she walked like Diana in a riding-habit, and I need not say more.

And on the road through the beautiful old forest, by a mere accident, as they thought, (though it was the work of fate, as performed by Miss Jemima, who was on horseback, too, and as capable of leaping a five-barred gate as a woman of twenty-five,) Laura and Fred found themselves side by side; and they talked, perhaps rather too much, in their mutual eagerness to show how changed and wise they had become.

And, apropos to some worldly remark of Laura's, Fred said, "But, dear me, didn't all New York, last winter, say you were about to become what the shoddy woman called a 'lordess'—it was cruel of you to disappoint people."

"Oh, I don't know!" said Laura, feeling an inward rage that made her fingers tingle to hit him in the face with her riding-whip. "I feel it a duty to disappoint people—it does them good."

"I'm sure I congratulate you on having a 'duty' of any sort," drawled Fred. "Is it nice? Wonder if a fellow could be vaccinated for it, or something of that sort, you know?"

Was he talking in that empty-headed way because he was a blatant idiot who copied English models? Then came another thought—was he doing it from insolence, coolly making fun of the fine people she had been talking about?

"I believe," said she, in a voice that was too civil for her words to sound rude, "you have only lately been released from very unpleasant duties, so you must have a tolerably clear idea of what they are like."

"Oh, dear, yes!" said Fred, with a good-natured laugh; "you mean to remind me I'm a parvenue, not born to greatness, and so forth. Fact, too. Odd, isn't it, how some one forgets one's beginnings? Oh, yes! I grubbed with a pick, and wore a blue flannel shirt, and went unshaved—no wonder you shudder; and I might be at it yet, if I hadn't happened to strike the 'lucky,' as the miners say; and just then along came a lot of capitalists, fellows made of money, you know, and bought me out."

"Ah, indeed! What a pretty vine that is!" And Laura looked as if she would like to yawn, but all in the civil, elegant way that can be made to hold so much insolence.

"Yes, to both remarks," said Fred. "If that vine could only be trained and cultivated, how pretty it would be."

Laura decided that he meant to be impertinent.

"This sort of expedition is a frightful bore, isn't it?" said she.

"Oh, frightful! But when one is weak enough to visit one's friends, one must expect to be victimized."

"Complimentary to all parties," said Laura. "Your hostess would be charmed if she heard you."

"Ah! but she don't; and I will retract my heresy before I visit you at that English castle."

"I doubt if I shall have Americans about me," replied she, "I don't fancy them."

"How inconsiderate of your ancestor, whatever one it was, to emigrate, and so make you a Yankee in spite of yourself," said Fred.

"The air of Nevada has given you an amazing flow of spirits, Mr. Voorhies," said Laura. "I think we will wait for the carriage to come up, it is a shame of me to enjoy your conversation by myself. I dare say they are very dull without you."

Then Fred would have liked to bite her; but yet how handsome she was! He called himself by a great many opprobrious epithets in a flash; then he laughed.

"Are you too much bored for endurance?" he asked.

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"Oh, dear, no! I can bear a great deal! I only did not want to be selfish."

"Well, positively, since you are so kind, I may take the liberty of an old, old acquaintance to admit that I had forgotten to tell Mrs. Lambert something I promised to find out for her; so, since you wish it, we'll wait for the rest of the people."

"What a pretty creature she is," said Laura, looking quite enthusiastic.

And, because she said that so honestly, Fred could not see that Mrs. Lambert was very pretty, after all.

"A little faded," said he.

"Possibly," returned Laura. "Yes, I dare say, she is only a year younger than I. She's twenty-three; and really 'tis an immense age for a woman."

So she had Fred at a little disadvantage in her turn, and felt better natured; they both laughed.

"I believe I don't quite know what to say," said he.

"No, I see you don't! Never mind, don't be discouraged. You've not been long out of the mine; I dare say you'll improve."

"Thanks," said Fred; but his laugh sounded just as real, and there was no sign of being in the least touched. "Now, if I could only have a teacher like you—those women yonder are very well, but you, who are familiar with the ways of lords and ladies, and know exactly what ought to be said or done on all occasions, your advice would be invaluable."

Laura wanted to use her whip again.

"There are times," said she, and it was a great effort to say it pleasantly, "when people would do better to say nothing."

"Appear better, you mean, perhaps?"

"Perhaps I do! How those horses creep; at this rate it will be midnight before we get to the top."

"Now that's cruel of you, when I am thoroughly enjoying this meeting you—one so seldom comes across one's old friends."

"Oh, bless me!" said Laura, "don't you think even seldom is several times too often? Old friends remind one that one is growing old. They say, 'Why, you haven't changed in the least;' and of all annoying speeches, that is the worst."

"I shall not say it, Miss Herford," said Fred, more gravely; "you are thoroughly changed."

"Perhaps you have no clear recollection of what I was—I mean how I looked, of course."

But he was not to be caught that way.

"Naturally I had not," said he; "one can't carry mental photographs of one's friends about for centuries; but now that I see you, I notice the change plainly."

"I am very much handsomer than I was as a young girl," said Laura, coolly; "I was too thin, and I was dreadfully awkward and shy."

"You were reticent, rather than shy. Oh, no! you weren't awkward!"

"How good of you!"

"As for the beauty——"

"That I never allow to be discussed."

"Pardon; you mentioned it."

"Being my own, such as it is, I may take the liberty;" and she slightly emphasized the pronoun.

Then up came the carriages, and the rest of the equestrians, and the conversation ended; and each, instead of feeling politely indifferent toward the other, as both had intended, felt irritated and annoyed, and wanted to talk more, and say a great many atrocious things.

This was the beginning of a line of conduct which they pursued toward each other for a full fortnight; and though both meant to be perfectly careless and indifferent, it was impossible that tolerably strong feelings should not be roused in their minds.

There were times when Laura cherished a hot resentment toward the man whom she had so proudly declared to have passed out of her life, and to be nothing but a name to her. Yet, even when they parted, both sore from a sharp, wordy conflict, no matter what subject came up, they managed, unconsciously to themselves, to bring personal feeling into it; and Laura thought for a half-hour she would go away and not be exposed to meeting that intensely aggravating man again. She staid, and as the hour for his daily visit approached, would find herself restless, with the old feeling strong, as if "waiting" for something; but when she discovered that, she explained it to herself by asserting that it was because "he set her nerves on edge."

And Fred went through all the stages of varying emotions, and very soon owned to himself that he was far from as indifferent as he had supposed; nay, the time came when he quarreled with himself for loving her still, with all the passion of early youth, that had, apparently, been frozen into coldness, awakened to add its fire to the strength of his emotions.

He wondered at himself, knowing that she was heartless, that she had cast him off because, in the old days, they were both poor,

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and she was not true woman enough to be willing to wait, or to dare poverty.

And Miss Jemima, looking blind as an owl in the sun, saw and understood exactly how matters stood, and chuckled privately over their contentions, their elaborate civility to one another, Laura's elegant, fine lady airs, and Fred's nineteenth-century manners, which is supposed to say, "Lived it all out ages ago, you know—feeling, and love, and pleasure, and all that rubbish. Yes, by Jove! very well in novels, you see, 'cause the beggars must write."

Miss Jemima saw it all, and never so much as blinked suspicion. She made the house very gay; and everybody declared it was Miss Gem's crowning summer in the way of making things delightful.

Even Laura, to her intense astonishment and disgust, found herself actually amused; she who knew the world "from core to husk," and had lived through such centuries up to the sublime height of polite indifference, upon which one is not to be disturbed, though the sky fall, or one's friends are all swept away by a storm into the Gulf of Mexico.

Finally, the time came when Laura must depart—there was some previous engagement which must be kept—and Miss Gem decided that if these two parted in the state of mind they then were, probably nothing could ever be done to set matters straight in this world, for Laura would marry her titled man, and Fred would undoubtedly—she reasoned logically, from her knowledge of humanity—proceed to make an immense fool of himself without delay.

So one day, when she and Laura were sitting together in a summer-house, away out in the shrubberies, and had been talking an immensity, and Gem had encouraged her in her worldliness and her cynicism, the crafty old maid said, suddenly,

"I'll tell you what, Laura, that flirtation you had years ago with Fred Voorhies was just what you needed—it showed you what trash romance is."

And Laura kept her face perfectly unmoved, but she did feel at that moment that she hated Miss Gem.

"Yes, indeed," continued Jemima, "it did you a world of good! If you had been a little more in earnest it would have been still better."

This was too aggravating.

"Thank you," said Laura, "I was quite enough in earnest. You and I tell the truth to each other——"

"Yes, sometimes," interrupted Gem. "Very well; as much as women can."

"That's better," said Gem; "and men can't tell it at all. But what is the truth?"

"That I was, like any dreaming girl, in love with my ideal—really in love, mind you. I thought Fred Voorhies was the reality—that was my mistake. I discovered the fact very soon, and, of course, from that time he was nothing to me."

"Of course," said Jemima, dryly. "But how did you happen to be wise enough to find out before it was too late to remedy matters?"

"Because he was a born trifler," said Laura, contemptuously. "When he began to reflect, he saw he had gone further than would be comfortable for his selfishness; so he began to be afraid of poverty for me."

"Sweet creatures men are—so thoughtful," said Jemima. "So you saw it, and sent him about his business?"

"Naturally. It came out in a conversation he had with my aunt, who, if not exactly a woman you like, you will acknowledge is a very shrewd, clear-sighted woman."

"Very shrewd," said Jemima; and felt an unwomanly and unchristian desire to swear—for she was certain now of what she had always suspected, that the "old cat had done it."

And Jemima, looking down the walk—she had eyes like a lynx—saw Fred Voorhies in the distance. She sat still and allowed Laura to diverge to worldly wisdom, by way of proving how far she had lived beyond that girlish folly.

"Yes, yes, you are right," said Jemima; "you were meant to be a duchess! My dear, never let heart stand in the way of common sense."

And again Laura felt she hated her.

"Dear me!" said Gem "I forgot about my farmer—he wanted to see me. Stay here and read; I'll be back soon—it's nice to get away from the people."

Off she trotted—met Fred Voorhies, put her arm in his, whirled him suddenly into a side-path, and shook her fist in his face, all without a word.

"Does that mean good-morning?" asked Fred.

"Fred, my love," said Jemima, "all men are asses—you're the biggest one I know."

"Thank you," said Fred.

"You needn't; it's a pleasure to me to speak the truth—sometimes."

"If any woman in the world ever feels disposed for that, I wouldn't stop her," quoth sarcastic Fred.

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"Let me see," said Jemima; "weren't you once engaged to Laura Herford?"

"I believe the lady did me the honor to let me think so, till she got frightened at my being in earnest."

"How do you mean?"

"She was afraid of the poverty, and commissioned her old fiend of an aunt—I beg your pardon——"

"Don't, I pray! Call her worse names if you like, my dear; my morality is well seasoned, and can bear a great deal. Her aunt——"

"To inform me of the fact? No; to beat round the bush till I saw what she was at. You may be sure I very speedily set her mind at rest."

"Yes, indeed, sure you did!" and Jemima nodded her head, and seemed to approve immensely. "You flew into one of your old rages at once."

"I believe I did."

"Yes, yes; and sent aunt and niece to—to—— Well, where the angels don't go."

"I did not care where she went," growled Fred; "she was not the girl I had believed—she was nothing to me."

Jemima stopped nodding, fixed him with her big, gray eyes, and an uplifted finger.

"Oh! you double-distilled essence of all that's silly—you *man!*" said she. "And the blessed aunt who liked you so much, and was sorry Laura was frivolous. Oh! I know! She told Laura you were afraid, and lazy——"

"She lied!" shouted Fred.

"Did she? Well, don't scream. I hate to have my robins frightened—it's all over now."

"Over!" yelled Fred. "That girl broke my heart! She might have known I was ready to dig, beg—die for her!"

"Dear me!" said Jemima. "What an odd coincidence!"

"What is?" snapped he.

"Why, so was she for you; and aunty, dear soul! said you wanted to be let off."

"The infernal old——"

"Yes, indeed; very nice woman! Well, well! it's all for the best—you don't care about her now! She was just telling me how wise her aunt was; how she found out you wanted to draw back."

"Who was?" snarled Fred, beginning to feel dizzy.

"Laura, of course. Why, how stupid you are! She's in the summer-house. But come with me, I want to show you my lilies."

Fred almost pushed her out of the way, unconsciously, as he would have pushed, or tried to, fire, water, a mountain, that had stood between him and Laura, and dashed toward the arbor.

Gem stood and looked after him, and smiled. "Old woman," said she, "you are not worth much, but you've been allowed to do a little good."

She walked slowly toward the house; but it was several hours after before anybody saw Laura and Fred Voorhies.

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AMONG THE PHILISTINES.
BY DAISY VENTNOR.
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AMONG THE PHILISTINES.

BY DAISY VENTNOR.

"Pretty, but too pale."

"How can you say so, Sophia? She is totally devoid of style."

"But her eyes are lovely," said Rushbrooke Clyde, somewhat warmly for him.

Alice Wharton colored violently under her rouge. "Mr. Clyde going in for the bread-and-butter school!" said she, with a languid drawl. "How refreshing! Where did Clara dig up that piece of simplicity?"

"Down in Connecticut, I should think," said Sophia Layne, "I rather like Miss Chester, but she evidently looks upon all of us with holy horror, as being a decidedly fast lot."

"Amen!" said Clyde. "I didn't give the young lady credit for so much penetration."

Aileen Chester, the unconscious object of these remarks, was standing, one foot arched over her ball, as she paused a second to sight the wicket before croqueting it. Clyde saw that she was evidently engrossed in making her shot—not in displaying that lovely foot and ankle—and his languid interest in the girl went up a degree in consequence.

"Very fairly done, Miss Chester," he said, rising, as her ball came near him.

"Thank you," said Aileen, taking the ball from him. "Do you ever play yourself?"

"Not often. It's rather a bore now-a-days."

"Oh!" said she.

A perfectly quiet intonation, that made Clyde bestow a quick glance upon her. A tall, slender figure, with a certain quiet grace in its movements; hands and feet beautifully formed, and small for her height. The face rather pale, with a most determined mouth and chin; and her hair, rich, warm chestnut, worn in a careless fashion of curls and braids, that was refreshing to the eyes after the frizzled heads of the rest of the company. Eyes "lovely," he repeated, mentally; gray, with long, black lashes, and dark eyebrows; clear, pure eyes, such as you rarely see in any but a child's face; and the forehead above them, broad and square at the temples, with the blue veins easily traced beneath the delicate skin.

"How long have you been here?" asked Clyde, bringing a chair for her. The interest of the game happened to be, just then, on the other side of the lawn, and they were left alone for a few minutes.

"A week to-day. You were in Boston when I came."

"Yes, I remember. Then you have been at Glen Mora long enough to make it fair to ask how you like it?"

To his surprise she colored extremely, as she replied,

"I like it—rather well."

"Faint praise!" said he, stifling a smile; for Glen Mora was a place where people fibbed, and fussed, and almost fought to get an invitation, its hostess, Mrs. Mortimer Clay, was so aristocratic and exclusive; yet the girl could find nothing to say for its charms and privileges, but that she liked it—"rather well!"

"I am not used to it," she said, modestly, after a pause. "I think your life here bewilders me, with its constant round of gayety. Besides, I am so slightly acquainted; you have your own set, you know, and very naturally do not care for an insignificant stranger."

"In short, you think us exclusive, and rather fast," said he, a trifle nettled.

"Yes," said she, with the utmost calmness.

"I hope," he said, "you will like us better when you get used to us; and as for having a tinge of the 'fast' element—New York manners, you know."

"I have been in New York occasionally, for Mrs. Clay is my cousin," said she, with a droll smile, "and I *don't* know."

The players now called loudly for Miss Chester, and she left him to make her stroke.

When she came back to her place again, Clyde was smoking, and Sophia Layne standing beside him, lighting a cigarette.

"At last," said she, taking a puff, "it's about a month since I've smoked one, is it not, Clyde?"

He signed assent, and Sophia turned around and offered one mischievously to Aileen.

"No, thank you," said she; to Clyde's secret delight, taking the offer as a joke, not as a trap for her simplicity, which Sophia intended it to be. "Do you have trouble with your throat, Miss Layne?"

"Why?" asked Sophia, mystified.

"I supposed that you smoked on that account," said Aileen, innocently. "I have frequently heard doctors recommend it even to ladies."

An intensely amused smile shot over Clyde's

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face; the truth being that Sophia smoked because she thought it looked "fast," which the men in private rather laughed at. Unfortunately for her, Sophia saw his expression, and, angry at it, threw a glance of blazing indignation upon them both, dashed the cigarette on the grass with the air of a tragedy queen, and marched off toward the house.

Clyde, when Sophia was out of hearing, burst into a fit of laughter at Aileen's face of utter bewilderment.

"Oh! what have I done?" said she, in evident distress. "I did not say anything rude, did I? And Miss Layne has been more kind to me than any one; I'll run after her and beg her pardon, if you'll only tell me why she was so angry."

"Better not, my child," said he, laying a kindly hand on her arm. "She forgot herself, that's all; and you gave her a pretty hard hit without knowing it." A suspicion of the true state of the case flashed upon Aileen. "She will never speak of it again, and be sure that she is just the woman who would never forgive you for doing so. And you couldn't convince her that you did not 'play innocent,' instead of really being so."

Aileen was so annoyed that her eyes filled with tears.

"I never say things in that way," said she, with much sweetness, "and I hope you do not think so."

"I? No, indeed, my child," said he, gravely.

This time she noticed the familiarity, and that being one of the traits which was most disagreeable to her in the manners of the whole set, she rebuked him then and there.

"I would rather have you call me Miss Aileen," she said, blushing very much.

If a dove had flown in Rushbrooke Clyde's face he could not have been more amazed! For he was, to do him justice, too thorough a gentleman to offend even her nice sense of propriety; and he had used the term inadvertently, exactly as he would have done had she been the child in years that he felt her to be in purity of heart.

"For the second time this morning I am forced to beg your pardon," he said, "and on this occasion most sincerely. I beg you to believe it was unintentional; you seem like a child to me. I wonder how many years I am your senior?"

"I am older than you think," a little shyly. "I am two-and-twenty, Mr. Clyde."

He looked surprised; and, indeed, she would have passed anywhere for eighteen.

"How your looks belie you, then," he said. "Well, I am thirty-four. Is not that old enough for me to be fatherly?"

"I'm afraid not," said she, with a merry laugh. They were getting acquainted rapidly now; she was so frank and fresh that he was fascinated with her, and he laid himself out to be agreeable for the next hour. And when he chose, there were few women whom he could not please; for Rushbrooke Clyde was an extremely clever man, was popular in society, and, better still, stood high at the bar. Malicious people charged him with flirting; but in his coterie it was whispered that he was at last captive, and to Sophia Layne. She was an extremely beautiful woman of the Spanish order; clever, calculating, but, although passively good-natured, without a particle of real heart.

"But I hardly believe in the engagement," said Mrs. Clay, one day, to Aileen, "though he may drift into marrying her, unless he falls in love with some one else very shortly. I confess that I am, sometimes, a little surprised to see the extent of her flirtation with Harry Dale. There's a man, Aileen, whom I don't care to have you know very well."

And thus Aileen, as I have told you, thinking Clyde almost the same as an engaged man, allowed him to get acquainted with her shy, sweet self.

It was a pleasant month for both of them, for Sophia was too clever to allow Clyde to think her jealous at this state of the game; and although she liked to shock Aileen (and did continually) by her fast ways and speeches, she kept pretty good friends with her outwardly. Aileen was too fresh and artless a creature to realize beside what a precipice she was walking now; and Clyde resolutely shut his eyes to all but the present enjoyment. Perhaps, of all of them, Mrs. Clay was the only one who saw whither this close intimacy was tending; and she only smiled, well pleased, and said nothing.

"Alice," said Sophia Layne, calling her friend into her room one morning, "is your heart bent upon going to the Brainards' *soiree* this evening?"

"Why? What plan have you on foot?"

"To spoil sport for somebody—exactly! Really, where you have a pet aversion in view, your wits are even quicker than usual. You remember our plan for a drive to Carlington with Clyde and Harry Dale? I mean to take it to-day, that's all, and then you may trust me for 'delays,' and 'accidents.' That little saint has trodden on rose-leaves long enough—it is

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time I called back *my* cavalier!" And with the reckless laugh of a woman who is determined to carry her point at any cost, Sophia touched the bell for a servant.

Rushbrooke Clyde had, among other good gifts, a very rare and beautiful tenor, so fine that it had created a genuine *furore* in town, and received the highest compliments from professionals. He had promised to sing at the Brainards' *musicale*, and that morning was practicing with Aileen in the music-rooms. It was, therefore, not especially agreeable to be interrupted by a note from Sophia, and having read it, he looked annoyed.

"How provoking! Last week I promised Miss Layne that I would drive over to Carlington with Dale, Miss Wharten, and herself, and now she sends me word that the party is arranged for to-day, as Dale goes into town on business to-morrow; and I wanted to take you out on horseback this afternoon."

"Never mind," said Aileen, lightly, "you will be back for the *soiree*, and the ride will lose none of its pleasures by being anticipated a little longer."

"Will it not?" he said, softly. "Remember that I am going in Mrs. Clay's carriage to the *soiree* with her and yourself."

"And Miss Layne——" she hesitated.

He laughed, and answered, "Will go with Dale, probably. Adieu—promise not to be lonely."

Aileen busied herself in various ways that afternoon, partly because she felt a curious presentiment of evil hanging round her. She was by no means a nervous girl; but she drew a most relieved breath when six o'clock came, and she remembered that the party must soon be home. There came a low knock upon her door; she opened it, and found Mrs. Clay outside.

"I mean to start in a few minutes, Aileen," said she. "It is excessively stupid of Clyde to keep us waiting; I never knew him to be so rude. Provoking! Sophia will be sure to take an extra half-hour for her toilet—and Clyde sings very soon, does he not?"

"His place is second," said Aileen; "but you could induce Miss Brainard to play before him, no doubt, and that would give a little extra time in case they are very late. How extremely odd."

Mrs. Clay looked troubled, and Aileen, seeing it, took fright. "You don't think that any accident——" she panted, turning pale.

"Nonsense, child; don't fill your head with absurd ideas. More likely to be one of Sophia's whims—that woman grows worse and worse."

It was in a most unamiable frame of mind that Mrs. Clay swept down to her carriage, followed by Aileen. When they arrived, Miss Brainard rushed to meet them.

"Oh, Mrs. Clay!" said she, "I have a telegram for you from Crayford."

"Crayford!" ejaculated Mrs. Clay, as she opened the dispatch; "I am sure that I have no idea." Then her eyes began to sparkle, and her color rose resentfully. "Upon my word, this is——" She checked herself, and turned to Miss Brainard with a careless laugh. "You will be deprived of your 'star' for this evening; Mr. Clyde telegraphs me that he is unavoidably detained at Crayford. By-the-way, what sort of accommodations do they have there?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Why, what an abominable shame!" cried Miss Brainard, just on the verge of tears, as she realized her disappointment. "I never heard of such a thing in my life. When did you see Mr. Clyde last?"

"At lunch. Don't worry yourself; he has plenty of company, for Dale, Alice, and Sophia went with him." Looking up, she caught Aileen's face of agonized entreaty; but she was too much a woman of the world to let the story look any worse than it was, by appearing to conceal any part of it, so she resumed in a gayer tone, "They went off for a drive, (heaven save the mark! I hope they've not lamed my grays,) and I presume that Sophia and Alice are quite able to take care of themselves, even at a wretched country tavern, and without a chaperone. Make the best excuses you can—no one will be surprised at Sophia's escapades. This is a little the worst one I ever knew, however," Mrs. Clay added, bitterly, as her hostess left the room. "Aileen, for heaven's sake! don't take it so hard. It's stretching a point to the utmost, I know; but there's a comfort in belonging to a set where we seldom throw stones, even when people, like Sophia, go at Satan's own pace."

"Clara, I don't at all know what you mean," said Aileen, with a low sob. Truly, her heart was very sore, and her eyes had the look of a startled fawn's.

Mrs. Clay was touched by her pitiful distress.

"My poor little one! don't be ashamed of it; other women have loved Rushbrooke Clyde," her voice was unsteady for half a second, "who were not half as dear to him as——" Aileen's hand closed her lips.

"Do not say it—I cannot bear it! How could I be so wicked?"

Mrs. Clay's eyes opened wide with surprise.

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"That *is* a new view of it," said she. "Aileen, my pet, I should never have brought you among such a set of Philistines as we are at Glen Mora. But, child, good and true as you are, I, out of my worldliness, would give you one caution—be slow to condemn, and don't wreck your happiness by too delicate a sense of honor. There, we'll say no more about it; we have had our tragedy in peace. Let me look at you—yes, you are fit to go down now."

Miss Brainard's *soirée* was voted a perfect success, and my little heroine went through it in a calm, undisturbed fashion, that did credit to her new training. But her whole sense of right was outraged; she had allowed herself to love a man who was engaged to another woman, perhaps she had been base enough to come between that woman and happiness. And such a man, too—unscrupulous they called him, but he had been *so* kind and so tender to her. And Aileen's heart softened as she remembered the looks, and tones, and words even, that had lulled her in such calm security. Poor child! she wanted to do right, but her duty and her love were, as they often are, on opposite sides, and her cheeks burned with haughty fire, as she said her cruel lesson over and over, and put away from her wounded, outraged soul the few words that Mrs. Clay had spoken for her comfort.

There was much laughing among the ladies, and sly jokes at Clyde's expense, the next day, when the runaway quartette returned to Glen Mora. Clyde searched for Aileen in all her usual haunts, but she did not appear until dinner-time, and then contrived to get wedged in at table where he could not even see her. Miss Layne was in high spirits, and more beautiful than ever. She said that they had driven on from Carlington to Crayford, and when arrived there, she was glad to find that they had comfortable quarters, for she was seized with one of her worst headaches.

"And you know, Clara, what my headaches are," said she, rather plaintively, to Mrs. Clay, at the other end of the table.

"Yes, I know," returned her fair hostess, with an emphasis that caused a sly smile to run around the table.

Miss Layne vouchsafed nothing more; and Miss Wharton, catching sight of Aileen's flushed face and troubled eyes, smiled, with a triumphant sneer lurking in the corners of her mouth, that she might have learned from Mephistopheles himself.

It is really astonishing with what cleverness a girl (even one as free from guile and worldliness as Aileen Chester) can avoid explanations with a man whom she thinks she has cause to doubt. Aileen's experience had come to her at last; the great enchanter had laid his spell upon her, and, struggle as she might, she knew that her heart had gone out to this man. But she kept close at Mrs. Clay's side, and Clyde, somehow, could never cross the invisible barrier that hedged her in.

The pause gave Clyde time for reflection, and he found out that life was fairer since he had known Aileen. One day, being chafed beyond his patience, he waylaid Mrs. Clay, and with a droll mixture of fun and earnestness, told her that she must contrive to persuade Aileen to give him a hearing. She heard him out, and then dryly said, "You will have hard work to explain to her your past position in regard to Sophia——"

"I shall not try!" he interposed.

"Don't interrupt me—for Aileen does not at all understand flirtations *a la mode.*"

"Heaven forbid she should!" he ejaculated.

"Both polite and pious, upon my word! I forgive you, if you will make her a happy child once more. But you must find your own opportunity, for, upon this subject, I cannot approach her. We are going up Mount Tom, on a picnic, to-morrow—try it then. She is an angel, Clyde—be careful of her!" and a few warm tears wet her lovely face as she walked away.

You see Mrs. Mortimer Clay had a heart, society to the contrary, notwithstanding—and Aileen had found the door to it.

That evening, when Aileen was dressing for dinner, one of the servants brought her a most exquisite bouquet of violets, purple and white. There was no card attached to them—but none was needed; and Aileen's cheeks would have given unbounded satisfaction to the donor, could he but have seen their lovely coloring. But the blush faded, and she looked sadly at the flowers, while she considered what to do with them. The decision went against carrying the bouquet; but I am afraid that Aileen was too transparent a character to venture upon crossing foils with so experienced a fencer—for Rushbrooke Clyde's eyes took an odd gleam of contentment when he saw her enter the room without his peace-offering. He tried her very much that evening, however; for, being urged to sing, all that he could be prevailed upon to give them was the old ballad of "Aileen Aroon," which he sung with such exquisite tenderness and pathos that it touched even Alice Wharton, and made an

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uneasy shadow settle down upon Sophia Layne's face. As for the gentle girl for whose ears he was singing it, she took timely warning from the first notes of the song, and left the room, unnoticed except by Mrs. Clay and Clyde.

The picnic, which Mrs. Clay had suggested to Clyde as his best opportunity, was a large affair, and included about half the neighborhood. This going up Mount Tom, be it understood, was no small undertaking; and as the party proposed to lunch upon a large, flat boulder, (familiarly known as "Tom's Seat,") located about four miles up the mountain, they started soon after breakfast. Some of the ladies were to go in wagons, some on horseback—that is, as far as they could do so; for, at the least, they had about a mile to walk, scrambling over rocks, by very dubious paths, at the best. Unfortunately for Clyde's wishes, Aileen rose that day with a terrible headache, and thinking that it would probably pass off if she kept perfectly quiet, she sent word to Mrs. Clay that she could not go with the party, but would try and join them on their return. Instead of sending a message in reply, Mrs. Clay came into Aileen's room before starting.

"How very vexatious!" said she. "I almost feel like postponing the affair, if it would not disappoint so many people. At any rate, there are some doubtful clouds in the west, but I mean to hurry them back, as it would not be agreeable to get caught on 'Tom's Seat' in a storm. And now, what did you mean about joining us?"

"I can take one of your horses, and Graves, your groom, and, provided my head is better by two o'clock, I can reach the Halfway-Stone House in time to meet you. If you are not there, I can wait for you, and then I shall have the ride home with the party."

"Very well; but take Topsy, instead of Diana—the mare is not as sure-footed. What lovely violets! I shall be jealous of you, Aileen. The gardener never sends me such."

"I don't think your gardener had anything to do with these flowers," said Aileen, in a very low voice.

Mrs. Clay eyed her steadily for a moment. "I was charged with a message for you—don't ask me to recollect the precise terms—the sense of it was, that a substitute could be found for Graves, and a groom's services dispensed with."

Aileen raised her head from the pillows, and tears sprung into her eyes.

"Don't you tempt me, Clara. Please give Graves his orders."

Mrs. Clay looked as if she was strongly tempted to add something else; but discretion returned to her, so she kissed the unsteady lips, and having drawn the curtains, left the room without further remark.

The pain throbbed on in Aileen's temples, and her heart kept bitter time with it. She wondered why Clyde had sent that message; he had better make apology to the Brainards, for she did not see very clearly how he was to broach the subject to her, after her pointed avoidance of him. And what should she do and say when he spoke (as he surely must mean to) of his engagement? It was a sorry business at the best; and Aileen crushed back the tears, and strove to calm herself.

Toward noon the pain in her head grew better, and ringing the bell for the horses, she put on her habit.

"The weather looks a little doubtful, Graves," said she, to the groom, as he mounted her. "Do you think there is danger of a storm?"

"Not 'fore you get to the Halfway-Stone House, Miss; and if it do rain after that, Mrs. Clay ordered more carriages sent, and the saddle-horses can stay there till it clears. Topsy has went lame to day; so I brought you Diana, as usual, Miss."

Aileen patted the neck of the beautiful black mare, and wondered for half a minute whether she risked anything by going off in such uncertain weather. But she was an accomplished and fearless rider, and, furthermore, felt as if any risk were better than her troubled thoughts at home; so she ended the mental discussion by starting off on a sharp trot, followed by Graves.

The two miles ride to the foot of Mount Tom were safely performed, although the sky began to look very black and threatening. They continued on up the mountain-path, and had gone half a mile further, when the girth of the groom's saddle broke, and, at the same time, the rain began to fall.

"You'll get wet to the skin, Miss, if you wait here," said the groom, seeing Aileen's dismayed face; "but no harm can come to you on this ere road. You'll not meet a soul; so you'd best ride on as fast as the up-hill ground will let you, to the Halfway-Stone House. I can walk; and a wetting won't hurt me nor the horse. You beant afraid?"

"No," said she, though a little tremulously. "Isn't there a turn in the road somewhere?"

"Yes; but it goes up the mountain, south of the house. You must keep straight ahead for a good bit after you pass the other path, and then you're there, Miss."

Aileen wheeled the horse into the path, and gave her a slight touch of the whip. But the

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situation was far from agreeable, alone on a mountain-path; the mist rising fast; a distant rumbling of thunder coming nearer and nearer; and her animal rather skittish.

Meanwhile, the gay party who composed the picnic had fared very pleasantly. The lunch was charming of its kind; and as the storm was discovered in time, the ladies were safe on the piazza of the Halfway-Stone House, when the first great drops began to fall.

Clyde was standing on the steps, looking rather dreamily down the road, when a flash of lightning blazed across the sky, followed by a heavy crash, and mingled with it a horrible, long-drawn cry.

Mrs. Clay flew across the piazza.

"For heaven's sake, what is it?" cried she, breathlessly.

"What is often heard on a battle-field," said Clyde, who had served in the war; "it was the neigh of a horse in mortal fright or pain. I hope that none of yours are hurt."

"Aileen!" she gasped, in an agonized voice.

"Good God!" he cried, "what do you mean? Is she not already here?"

Mrs. Clay shook her head.

There came another flash, and when she looked up again, she saw Clyde tearing down the steep path at the back of the house, from which direction the cry had seemed to come.

It had grown very dark, and the thick mist was choking, while the rain came in great gusts and whirlwinds, that bent the tall trees all around him. As Clyde pictured Aileen alone on the mountain, mounted on that fiery mare, his heart sunk, and he feared—he hardly knew what. The path took an abrupt turn at an overhanging ledge, and just as he came to it, another brilliant flash lit up the darkness. With a sudden consciousness that, at this point, the path upon which he stood must overlook the other, he sprung to the edge and gazed down.

On the narrow path, directly below him, lay a grand old oak, blasted by the lightning; back of it, quivering with terror, with dilated nostrils, and hoofs planted firmly in the grass, stood the black mare; while just beyond her, her hat gone, her hair unbound, her pale face set and white, knelt Aileen Chester.

Out above the tempest rang a glad cry,

"Aileen! Aileen! Oh, thank God!" he cried.

She lifted her white face at the sound; and he felt as if it was the face of an angel.

"Move further away from the mare," he called, loudly; "don't be alarmed at what you see me do."

As he said this in an encouraging tone, he caught the limbs of a slender sapling that grew just on the verge of the ledge, and as the little tree bent with his weight, he swung himself lightly over, and in a second dropped on the ground near her.

"My darling! my darling! are you hurt?" he cried, as he raised her off the ground.

She tried to thank him, to be brave and calm, but her senses seemed half paralyzed. He took her into his arms, chafed her cold hands, and endeavored to shield her from the beating rain. Finally, she burst into a great sob, and forgetful of all her heroic resolves, laid her head against his breast. He let her weep on for several moments, and then he slipped his hand under her chin, and spoke,

"Tell me all the naughty things that you have been thinking of me, Aileen. Darling, you have tried my patience sorely."

"And do you think that I was endowed with more than you?" she whispered.

He smiled.

"My darling, you know that I love you—could you not trust me a little? That ridiculous escapade of Sophia's was all premeditated, and you and I was to have been the innocent victims. I went to drive, fully intending to return, as I told you, in time for the *soiree;* but we got to Carlington so much earlier than we expected, that the ladies spoke of extending the drive; and finally Sophia suggested that we should go on to Crayford, and there take the cars home, leaving the horses to return the next morning. I agreed to the proposal, for the train at six o'clock would have brought me back in time to go with you. But at Crayford I found, to my surprise and anger, that Sophia had deliberately lied on the subject of the train, and there was none until seven in the morning. I taxed her with the falsehood, and we had a scene that evening, on the piazza of that country tavern, that I think Miss Layne will not soon forget."

"But you were engaged to her?" questioned Aileen.

"No, pet," said he, "never. And after you came among us, like a star from another world, I could not have loved any other than you. But you have not spoken one word, dear! How long before you will give your pure little heart into my keeping?"

"I can't!" said she, starting away from him, as her quick ears caught the sound of voices above them.

"Aileen!"

She looked up at him with such lovely, spark-

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ling eyes, that his heart bounded with hope; and then, with a return of her quiet archness, she said, stealing her little hand in his,

"Because it's been yours for ever so long! But you've a great many questions to answer me yet, for all that."

Then Mrs. Clay and a troop of men descended upon them, and there arose a hubbub of thanksgiving and congratulation for Aileen's escape.

Her account was, that just before the crash came, she slipped off her saddle, and holding the mare firmly, prevented her from rushing under the falling tree. And as she was half-led, half-carried up the path to the house, and the storm began to cease, Aileen felt as if the clouds had rolled away from her heart with the rain, and that the brightest sunshine remained for her.

Of course, everybody said that the engagement was "just what you might have expected after such a romantic adventure;" to which Alice Wharton added her spiteful comment, that "it was really edifying to see so much cleverness under a saint's spotless robes!" Sophia escaped the scandal she might otherwise have provoked, by announcing her intention of marrying Harry Dale, (whom she accepted that evening;) and, therefore, not even her worst enemies dared say that Clyde had jilted her.

A few days ago I came across a paragraph in the paper as follows:—

"CLYDE—CHESTER. At St. George's church, by the Rev. Dr. Tyng, Rushbrooke Clyde, to Aileen, only daughter of Edmund Chester."

But the *beau monde* of Gotham rush on at a faster pace than ever, and their example spreads, and the chances grow less frequent, year by year, of capturing a girl like Aileen among the tribes of THE PHILISTINES.

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THE SECRET AT BARTRAM'S HOLME.: CHAPTER V
BY JANE G. AUSTIN.
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THE SECRET AT BARTRAM'S HOLME.

BY JANE G. AUSTIN.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 41.

CHAPTER V

Entering the house, the three young people found breakfast laid in the library, where they had spent the previous evening, and at the head of the table, with the coffee and tea-pots before her, sat Mrs. Nancy, pale, stern, and silent as at first. Miss Percival and Capt. Page were placed at either side of her. The two girls seated themselves in the two remaining side places, and Mr. Percival at the foot. If any one felt surprise at finding the housekeeper a member of the circle, no one expressed it by word or look; and she did not appear to suspect, for a moment, that any such wonder might exist.

Percival, in seating himself, glanced shrewdly into the faces of all his companions, trying to discover traces of a sleepless or disturbed night; but aunt Matilda was as placid, Capt. Page as cool, and Delia as smiling as possible; the frown upon the face of the latter having entirely disappeared before a few low-voiced compliments from Percival, as they walked toward the house.

"They have seen and heard nothing," thought Percival; but glancing carelessly toward the housekeeper, he found her strange, dark eyes fixed upon him with such an expression of earnest scrutiny, that he involuntarily colored a little.

"Can it be that she knows of this, and is looking to see how I bear it? Could she have had anything to do with it?" asked Walton of himself; and then remembering the distinct and detailed view he had taken of the figure upon the stairs, he dismissed the idea, and returned to all his original uncertainty, becoming so absorbed in reverie that it was not until his aunt had twice spoken to him, that he aroused himself with a start.

"Oh! I beg your pardon, aunt Mat. What did you say?"

"I am very sorry to disturb such a profound train of thought, my dear Walton; but I asked you on behalf of the young ladies, whether you remembered to purchase a croquet set, and whether it had arrived."

"Yes, I bought the set, and I told Ichabod to be sure that it came down; so I presume it did, and if every one has done breakfast, I think we had better go and select a croquet-ground."

As he spoke, he rose hastily and went toward the door. "I will see where the box is," added he, turning upon the threshold, and looking back at Mrs. Nancy, whose solemn eyes were fastened steadily upon him.

"Confound that old woman! She is like a basilisk," muttered he, striding through the lobby and out at the side-door.

"Shall we put on our bonnets and shawls and follow, my dears?" asked aunt Matilda.

Rose, smiling a little quizzically, said,

"By all means, cousin Matilda; only, please, not shawls, and for bonnets read hats. Don't you know we have come down into the country resolved upon shepherdessing to the fullest extent? Wait until you see!"

And the two girls, running merrily up stairs, presently reappeared in jaunty garden-hats: Delia's gay with cherry ribbons and poppies, and Rosamond's charming with ribbons of the color of the sky, and a handful of rose-buds. Fresh cambric, morning-dresses, pure white collars and cuffs, and chamois gloves, completed the simple and becoming costumes, and contrasted prettily with Miss Matilda's grim gray dress, small India shawl, and the decorous bonnet and veil, which she would have worn in her early marketing excursion at home.

The croquet-ground was soon selected, a little lawn at the eastern front of the house proving sufficiently level, and of a suitable size. Ichabod, unsummoned, appeared with a scythe to shave down the half-grown grass, and Percival found a seven-foot pole, with which to measure the distances. Delia and Rosamond brought the arches, and counseled as to position; and Capt. Page and aunt Matilda sat in the shade, upon two chairs which the gallant gentleman brought from the house for the accommodation of the ladies.

"Now for the sides! Who will take the fourth mallet—Capt. Page, or aunt Matilda?" cried Percival, gayly, as the last arch was placed in position.

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But Miss Percival did not play at all, and Capt. Page was evidently so reluctant to leave her and his comfortable seat, that Rosamond at last undertook to play both balls upon her own side against Delia, who was too indolent to be a good player, and Walton who played admirably.

Thus constituted, the game began, and proceeded to a most critical point; in fact, to the utter discomfiture of the allied powers by the pretty Napoleon, who, swooping down upon the enemy just as he was about to win, scattered his forces to the remotest corners of the field, and triumphantly went in to the goal almost without an effort. It was in the very midst of this brilliant operation that aunt Matilda suddenly exclaimed,

"Why, who is that looking out of the window?"

"Which window, Miss Percival? I see no one," replied Capt. Page, hastily scanning the front of the house.

"Why, that gentleman. Walton! Walton!"

"Yes, aunt," replied Walton, mechanically; and never removing his eyes from the pretty foot Rose was at that moment setting upon her ball, preparatory to a final croquette.

Miss Matilda rose and hastily approached him.

"Walton!" repeated she, laying her hand upon his arm, "who is that gentleman looking out of the third-story window? He seems to be watching Rosamond."

"Bravo, Rose! You are fairly victor. Excuse me, aunty, but the heat of battle, you know, is absorbing. What did you say to me?"

"I asked who that gentleman was, who has been looking out of the third-story window for the last five minutes?" repeated Miss Matilda, a little hurt at her nephew's inattention.

"Gentleman! Where? I don't see any," replied Walton, still speaking absently, and thinking of his game..

"Why, there! Nonsense! Now he's gone! Why could not you have attended to me at first?" And aunt Matilda walked toward her seat, her chin a little elevated.

Walton at once threw down his mallet, followed, and whispered an apology, which immediately recalled a smile to the thin lips of his devoted and placid-tempered relative.

"But about this gentleman," pursued Walton. "What manner of man was he, and out of which window did he look, and what did he look at?"

"He looked at Rosamond, and it was at that window with the blind half off—that one at the front corner of the house that I saw him; and he was a tall, dark, handsome man, of about thirty years old, as nearly as I could judge. There was nothing very remarkable in his appearance; but the wonder is, how he came in the third story of the house; for the housekeeper told us that the floors there were unsafe, and the rooms had not been entered for years."

"To be sure—I heard that myself. I will go in and see what it all means; but not a word, please, to the girls; they might be alarmed, you know, with some idea of burglars."

"Gracious! I hope you don't think——" began aunt Matilda.

But her nephew, hushing her with a sign, made a laughing apology to his fair comrades, who were already preparing for a new game, and went into the house.

In the lobby he met one of the maids, who informed him that Mrs. Nancy was in her own room, and had been for some time.

"Has any gentleman called this morning, or have you seen any one about the house?" inquired Percival, carelessly.

"No, sir; no one but yourself and the gentleman out there under the trees," said the girl, glancing through the open door; and Walton, without asking any further questions, went up stairs, and before knocking at the housekeeper's door, stood looking about him.

"Where is the stair-case to that third story?" thought he. But before his mind could suggest a reply to its own question, he was startled by a murmur of voices from behind the door, at which he stood.

"Mrs. Nancy has company, it seems," said he, half aloud, and knocked upon the door. The murmur of voices ceased immediately, but the door was not opened for a moment or two, so that, growing impatient, Percival knocked for the second time, when it was instantly opened by Nancy, who, however, held it in such a manner that no view of the interior of the room was possible. Through this crack, the peculiar eyes of the old woman stared out upon her visitor, with the strange, searching expression in their depths, which Walton Percival was growing to dislike, and almost to dread. Feeling, however, that the dislike was unfounded, and not willing to confess the dread even to himself, he nodded pleasantly to the white, stern face, and said,

"Excuse my intrusion. You were talking so busily that you did not hear my first knock."

"Talking! I am alone," replied the old woman, coldly.

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"Surely I heard voices as I stood before the door," persisted Walton.

"It is impossible. I am entirely alone," repeated Nancy.

Mr. Percival smiled incredulously, and continued,

"I came in, however, to ask you what gentleman occupies the third story of the house, and why——"

But to his infinite astonishment, the door was, at this moment, violently closed in his face, and the key was heard to turn sharply in the lock.

"Well, by all that is good and great!" exclaimed Walton, staring about him, and undetermined whether to be offended or amused.

As he thus stood, a peal of thin, crackling laughter, close behind him, caused him to turn hastily, just in time to catch sight of an old woman, who, with hand on hips, and pallid, grotesque face turned over her shoulder, so as to fix her eyes upon him to the last, was slowly retreating down the side corridor, which, it will be remembered, bounded one side of the housekeeper's room.

"Mrs. Nancy!" exclaimed Percival, springing to the entrance of the corridor, and looking eagerly down it.

But not a creature was in sight, although it would have been impossible for any one to traverse half the length of the passage, in the instant during which Percival had lost sight of the old woman.

Springing down the passage, the young man seized the handle of the door leading into the housekeeper's room from that side, and shook it violently. The door was locked, but was presently opened by Nancy herself, who, coming out into the passage, and closing and locking the door behind her, put the key in her pocket, and contemptuously inquired,

"Is this the way gentlemen behave where you were brought up, sir?"

"What's the meaning of all this foolery?" demanded Percival, too much excited to heed her taunt. "Who was talking with you in your chamber, and who was the man looking out of the third-story window, and who is the old woman who just passed down this corridor, and, probably, into this door? Why, too, did you close your door in my face just now?"

"Because I thought, from your questions, that you were either drunk, or insulting me with foolish jests," replied the housekeeper, in her cold, calm voice. "There was no gentleman in the third story; there could be none, for there is no entrance to those rooms. No one was with me in my chamber; and the old woman, who frightened you, was, probably, your own shadow. Are you satisfied?"

"Not at all, my good woman, either with your information, or your manner of giving it. Pray, did my aunt, Mrs. Bartram, allow you to talk to her in this manner?" asked Mr. Percival, haughtily.

"That was different—and I'm getting old. Young folks should put up with a good deal from old folks," said the woman, half apologetically; and good-natured Walton was more than satisfied.

"But about those people that I saw?" persisted he. "There was, certainly, an old woman who came to the entrance of this passage and looked at me——"

"I did," interposed Nancy, in a loud, harsh voice, as if to silence the question.

Percival stared.

"Then why not have said so?" asked he.

Nancy made no reply, but passed him, and went toward the front stairs. The movement reminded the young man of one of his mental queries, and he put it aloud.

"Where are the stairs leading to the third story, Nancy?"

"There are none."

"None whatever?"

"No."

"What became of them? There must once have been some."

"They were pulled down, and burned," replied Nancy; and closing the door at the foot of the stairs, she put a period to the sentence.

"How strange!" muttered Percival, going slowly back to the croquet-party.

CHAPTER VI.

"What is the matter with them all, Rose?" asked Delia, in a low, impatient voice, as Walton Percival disappeared in the house, and Miss Matilda, with a face whose troubled pallor could not be concealed or denied, went slowly back to her seat beneath the trees.

"I don't know—perhaps nothing," replied Rosamond, tapping her toe with her mallet, and wondering if this sudden alarm could be connected with the strange story her cousin had told her a little while before. Delia watched her sharply for a moment, then, with a forced laugh, exclaimed,

"Upon my word, Rosamond, you look like a conspirator. I believe you and Mr. Percival must have laid some plot this morning, and he has gone to look after it now. Is it not so?"

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"Certainly; conspiracy is my favorite amusement, you know," replied Rosamond, trying to turn off the question with a laugh.

"It seems to me you like your cousin better than you did at first," pursued Delia, with that bitter sweetness women occasionally use toward each other. Rosamond felt the honeyed sting, but could not confess it.

"You liked him very well at first, I believe," said she, carelessly.

"H'm! Well enough; but not to the extent of rising before light to take romantic walks with him," said Delia, so spitefully, that Rosamond lifted her clear eyes, fixed them for a moment steadily upon the flushed and angry face of her sister, and then walked silently away. Delia ground the heel of her boot into the soft turf, and bit her lips.

"Let her go," muttered she. "Why should I care for her anger? Why must she always come between me and everything? And giving me lectures on propriety, too, when she runs after a young man like this."

So Walton Percival, returning to the croquet-ground, found his late companions willing, but no longer eager to play; courteous, but not gay; and polite, instead of cordial.

"They are vexed because I ran away," concluded he, and forthwith made an apology, but no explanation, and, consequently, effected nothing toward restoring harmony. Next he proposed a drive, instead of more croquet; and the proposition met with eager acceptance, every one feeling that a change would be agreeable; but while the young ladies were away to dress, and Capt. Page to look at Ichabod harnessing the horses, Walton stayed behind to reassure his aunt, and succeeded only in puzzling her still more by his declaration that there was not, and could not have been a man where her own eyes had seen one.

"But, Walton, did you go up there and look?" persisted she, after a few moments of profound meditation.

"No, dear aunt; for, as I just told you, there are no stairs to the third story, and no one can get up or down."

"No stairs!" repeated Miss Percival. "Well, there must have been some once, and where were they?"

"To be sure, where were they?" repeated Percival, to himself. "I will find out. I believe that old woman is a humbug." And as he helped the ladies into the carriage, he could not help whispering to Rose,

"More developments! The mystery thickens. Don't fail to-night!"

"No," replied Rose, in the same tone; and a glance of intelligence passed between the cousins. Delia saw the glance, saw the whisper, but could not catch a word of its meaning. A hot color overspread her dusky cheek; and she lowered her eyes lest their angry light should be too easily read.

The relative position of the party differed to-day from yesterday, Capt. Page preferring to sit upon the box and talk with Ichabod, and Miss Percival making room for Rose beside herself. Delia, therefore, sat with Walton Percival upon the forward seat, and, half turning her back upon him, feigned to be intently watching the roadside as they rolled along. Percival at first did not heed her, but a sudden gust of wind swept the little embroidered handkerchief from her hand, and carried it to his breast. In removing it, the faint perfume of sandal-wood exhaled from it, and rising to the young man's brain with the species of intoxication which that most oriental of all perfumes always excites, led him to carry it to his face. Delia turned and looked full upon him, her splendid eyes dilating with wonder and delight. Overcome by a young man's idle impulse of gallantry, Percival pressed the little scented trifle to his lips, glanced across at his aunt and Rose, who were busy in adjusting their dresses harmoniously, and saw nothing, then restored the handkerchief to Delia, who received it with a burning blush.

"What have you been thinking of so earnestly?" inquired the young man, suddenly conscious of his own and his companion's silence.

"I have been learning my lesson, or trying to," replied Delia, almost in a whisper.

"Your lesson—what is it? Teach it to me." replied Walton, in the same voice.

"You have no need to learn it, fortunately," murmured Delia, so bitterly, that the young man started, and looked at her more seriously than he yet had done. But Miss Percival's dress was at last arranged, and she turned to her nephew with some trivial remark, and then conversation continued general through the drive. But Percival's feelings, or, perhaps, nothing more than his curiosity, was touched; and he was not a man to remain long unsatisfied in any matter where his own exertions would avail; so, in helping the ladies from the carriage, he reversed his style of helping them in, and it was to Delia he last gave his hand, and to Delia he whispered,

"Come into the garden with me, I want to speak to you."

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Delia flushed crimson, lifted her slumberous eyes to his with a gesture of assent, then allowed them to travel forward to Rose's retreating figure with ill-concealed triumph in the glance. Percival smiled ever so slightly, and turned toward the garden-path, repeating, "Come!"

"What is it?" asked Delia, gracefully gathering her trailing dress in both hands, and showing the handsome feet, of which she was pardonably proud.

"I want to talk with you a little, my dear cousin—by adoption. We have not seen very much of each other since——"

"Since you were horrified from my side by discovering that I was not Rosamond," said Delia, with an effective glance up, and then down.

"Horrified! How absurd! Cannot you imagine another emotion, another sort of disappointment I may have experienced in finding you were not as near to me as I supposed?"

"Excuse me, if in turn I exclaim, 'How absurdly you talk!' Do you really mean to say that you had rather I were your own cousin, than that Rose should be?"

"Now, really, that will not do; it is positively unfair to make so invidious a reply, as that question demands," said Percival, laughing, and at the same time wondering, if he were forced to give a truthful reply, what it would be. Delia tossed her head, and smiled disdainfully.

"'Glittering generalities' are safer, to be sure, than direct statements. A charming day, is it not?"

"A little cloudy, just now, with threatenings of a storm," replied Percival, looking merrily into her eyes, which sunk beneath the gaze.

"I wanted to ask you," continued he, presently, "what you meant by learning your lesson—the lesson that I, fortunately, had no need to learn? What is the lesson?"

"Humility, dependence, deference to your superiors," replied the girl, with passionate bitterness. "That is the lesson I have been trying for years to learn, and have not learned, and shall break my heart over, and still leave it unlearned."

"Delia, what is this you say to me?" exclaimed Percival, really shocked. "It cannot be that you have any need for these unhappy feelings. Your position with my sunny-tempered cousin——"

"A temper may be so sunny as to scorch and blister those exposed to its direct and unbroken rays," replied Delia, curtly. Percival looked at her keenly.

"Delia, do you mean that Rosamond treats you ill?" asked he.

"You would not answer me when I asked you a question no more invidious than that, and I imitate your caution. It is not my place to complain to you of your cousin and my—my mistress, we might as well call her," said Delia, her glowing color and flashing eyes suggesting the tempest within, although its outward manifestations were vigorously subdued.

"Rosamond considers herself rather your sister than your mistress, I am perfectly sure," said Percival, gently.

"Before people—yes, and very often in private; but it requires an excellent heart, and great strength of mind in any woman to resist the temptation to tyrannize, more or less, over a dependent, and especially one so friendless and forlorn as I."

"You, friendless and forlorn?" echoed Percival, incredulously.

Delia raised her eyes to his; they were filled with tears, and so pathetic in their timid appeal that the young man felt sorely tempted to dry them with his kisses. As it was, he tenderly took her hand and softly repeated,

"How can you be friendless, dear?"

"Am I not? Rosamond is fond of me when I do not contradict or thwart her, or fail to satisfy her demands; but, beyond her, whom have I in all the world?"

"You have me, Delia. You have a friend, a warm ally, a defender, an advocate, a cousin; nay, a brother, if you will, for the present, and for the future, who knows——"

"For the future, Rosamond's husband," interrupted Delia, turning away her face.

"Why should you say that? I have no present intention of becoming any one's husband; nor have I the least reason to suppose that Rosamond would accept me as a husband. She hardly likes me as yet."

"She seemed to like you well enough this morning while I watched you walking up and down this path, talking so confidentially," pouted Delia.

Percival laughed again.

"Our talk was not so confidential as yours and mine have been during the last half hour," said he. "And who knows but that Rosamond is watching us and drawing the same conclusions in her turn that you did?"

"I was not watching you, I was watching

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her," stammered Delia, blushing all over her face and neck.

"A fine distinction! You should have been a lawyer," replied Percival, with mock gravity. "But now, remember this, Delia; you are never to say again that you have no friend, no one to care for, protect, and defend you, for in me you have the warmest of friends, the most earnest of advocates; and you are always to call upon me in any trouble or emergency as freely as if I were your brother. Will you promise to do so?"

"I promise most gratefully," murmured Delia.

Percival raised the hand he still held to his lips, saying,

"Then thus we seal the compact."

Delia, without speaking, raised her dewy eyes to the face of her new friend, and something in the glance, he knew not what, emboldened him to clasp his arm about her supple waist, and repeat the kiss upon the ripe lips, whose pathetic curve blended so bewitchingly with the coquettish pout still lingering around them.

"Mr. Percival! Oh, for shame!" exclaimed Delia, as the kiss ended; and at the same time a somewhat stern voice called from behind the shrubs at their back.

"Walton! Are you here?"

"Pardon! Indeed, I could not help it, and it is only this once," rapidly murmured Walton, and then aloud,

"Yes, aunt, here I am."

"Oh! I did not know," and Miss Matilda appeared from behind the lilacs, with a face at once so shocked and so confused, that Percival was sure she had been near enough to witness his little indiscretion. She did not, however, ask or afford time for him to offer any explanation; but pausing where she stood, waited for him to approach, and then said,

"There is some serious trouble at the house, Walton, and if Miss Delia will excuse you, I should be glad of your advice."

"Certainly, aunt;" and Walton, seeing that Delia had already disappeared, offered his arm to his aunt, and escorted her toward the house.

CHAPTER VII.

"I WANT a little help, too, aunt Mat," began Walton, before his aunt could speak. "I fear I have offended Delia very much, indeed, and I want you to act as mediator."

"Ah!" dryly ejaculated Miss Matilda. "And of what nature is the offence?"

"Now, my dear aunt, you know that you were peeping from behind that lilac-bush, and saw me kiss her, and saw her tear away and flash indignant scorn at me, and all the rest, just as well as I see you a minute later. Now didn't you?"

"I am not in the habit of peeping, Walton," replied Miss Matilda, still unmollified.

"That is precisely what Delia just said. Is it a universal feminine trait to deny that soft impeachment?"

"How did you happen to commit such a breach of propriety, Walton?" severely inquired Miss Matilda.

"Why, I hardly know, except that I felt a great deal of pity and sympathy for her forlorn and friendless condition, and had been offering myself as a champion and kinsman; and Delia looked so unhappy, that really, aunt Mat——"

"And to show that you understood her forlorn and friendless condition, you insulted her as you would not have done if——"

"Really, aunt Matilda, if I thought you meant what you say——" began Mr. Percival, becoming suddenly grave.

But Miss Matilda in turn interrupted him.

"Well, we won't fight over it, Walty, and it was a foolish thing for you to do; but still it is my theory that no woman is kissed, or in any manner treated familiarly by a gentleman, unless she first has given occasion and invitation; so I do not believe that you will need any mediator with Miss Delia; and I only hope the reconciliation will not end in the way the quarrel began."

"Oh! how bitter and unsparing you women are with each other!" exclaimed Walton, a little angrily. "And the very ones who, like you, are angels of goodness to the men for whom they come, are the first to throw stones at the women by whom those men are attracted."

"You do not mean that you really care for that girl, Walton!" exclaimed Miss Matilda, uneasily.

"I care to see her well treated and kindly judged," replied her nephew, somewhat sullenly.

"That she shall be by me, at least," replied Miss Matilda, shortly; and after a moment added, "But if she is to make trouble between us two, Walty, it will not endear her to me. You cannot expect quite that."

"No one and nothing shall make trouble between us, dear aunt, and mother. No woman in the world has yet approached your place in my heart, nor do I think one ever will!"

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exclaimed Percival, with honest emotion in his voice; and aunt Mat wiping her eyes, held up her trembling lips for a kiss.

"It may not be as sweet as the last one you had, but it is, perhaps, quite as honest," whispered she.

"A Parthian arrow! Well, you have had the last word; and now that being ended, tell me what is the row at the house. Has Capt. Page been offering himself?"

"To whom, pray? Not to any one that I have heard of," replied Miss Matilda, with a little prim confusion. "No, the trouble is with the servants; the cook and chambermaid say they are going to leave us directly."

"Phew! There is a revolution in the kitchen, it seems. What is the complaint?"

"Why, that is the absurd part of it," replied Miss Percival, contemptuously. "The silly creatures say they are afraid, and that the house is haunted, and all sorts of stuff. If it was their food, or their work, or their wages, one could remedy, or, at least, argue the matter; but noises, and ghosts—what is one to say to such complaints as that?"

"What have they seen or heard?" asked Percival, gravely; and mentally taking a much more serious view of the matter than he would have done twenty-four hours earlier.

"Oh, dear, I don't know! I will let Susan tell it over again, if you like to hear. I hardly listened to what she said, but sent her back to her work 'with a flea in her ear.'"

"What does the housekeeper say?" asked Percival, smiling absently at his aunt's quotation.

"Nothing. I went to her with the women at my heels, but she only stared at us with those great, black eyes, and told me I must manage my own servants myself."

"She is not a very practicable person," said Percival, smiling at the recollection of his morning's interview with the old woman. "Well, if you will call Susan into your chamber, I should like to hear what she has to say."

"You certainly shall. Go up stairs, and I will bring her along."

Percival obeyed; and as he strode up the stairs and along the gallery, his thoughts reverted to Delia, and he began to wonder whether her suggestions regarding Rosamond could be founded in truth; and then whether his aunt's judgment of Delia was utterly prejudiced and false, or whether—— and at this point he turned the latch of Miss Matilda's door, and opening it slowly, found the grinning and malignant face of the old woman, whom he had seen in the morning, thrust through the aperture, and nearly touching his own. With an exclamation of horror the young man started back, still holding the door, and thus nearly closing it. The next instant, however, he recovered his presence of mind, and rapidly entering the room, glanced behind the door, and then through the chamber. No one was in it, nor were there any signs of a hasty departure by any other exit.

"How very strange! I don't wonder the servants won't stay!" exclaimed he, aloud; and a sharp and crackling laugh close in his ear seemed to reply. Hurriedly throwing open the door, Percival glanced into the gallery. It was empty, as was the stair-case; and he still stood staring down the latter when his aunt appeared, followed by Susan, a tidy, Nova Scotia girl of Scotch extraction, and not likely to be carried away by undue fancies, especially where a solid question of dollars and cents was involved. She dropped her little curtesy to the young gentleman, and stood, pale and trembling, beside the door.

"Sit down, Susan," began Mr. Percival, gently; "sit down and compose yourself. My aunt tells me that you have got nervous in this old house."

"I'm not one of the nervous sort, please, sir; and I like the place, and the work, and the wages, and the folks all first rate, sir, but——"

"There, there, Susan, don't cry! There is nothing to cry about, you know; and I want you to tell me the whole story quietly and sensibly, like a good girl as you are."

"I'll—try—sir." And Susan gulped down the next sob, rubbed her eyes upon a cotton handkerchief as fervently as if they had been made of silver, and she was cleaning them, and raised her head attentively.

"That's right, Susan. Now tell me what you have seen or heard that has frightened you? Begin at the beginning."

"Well, sir, last night, when me and Katy were just a retiring into bed, sir, and the light blowed out, something awful came into the room——"

"Something awful! Did you see it?"

"No, sir, but I felt it," said Susan, shuddering at the recollection. "And every minute I expected it to lay hold of me."

"Pshaw! I didn't think you'd be so foolish."

"I'm not foolish, sir," answered Susan, indignantly. "I heard it. Katy did, too, and she fell down, and thinks she was knocked down."

"Katy was frightened, and the noise was made by a mouse, and you lost your wits."

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"No, indeed, sir. It made my flesh crawl, it did, sir, to feel that awful something in the room. It was a spirit, sir," she said, in an awed voice. "Then there was a laugh, an unearthly one, and we both jumped into bed, covered our heads, and didn't know nothing more till morning."

"You foolish girl! I see just how it all was; either the cook or you stumbled against the other in the dark, and without waiting for explanations, you both got scared; and the laugh was either fancy, or Ichabod in the next chamber. So that is out of the way—and what comes next?"

"Well, sir, when we came down in the morning, the kitchen door wouldn't come open noway for ever so long; it was just as though some one held it on the other side, for it would give a little, and then it would shut, until all at once, when I just shook the latch the least mite with one hand, the door flew wide open, and after that there wasn't the least mite of trouble."

"Lock out of order. It must be repaired. What next?" inquired Mr. Percival, coolly.

"Well, sir, there was a good deal," replied Susan, a little huffishly. "There was noises in the pantry, like some one a-clattering of dishes; and the tins came all tumbling down, though I set them up myself as snug as need be; and things kept dropping out of Katy's hands just as if some one twitched 'em, and so it kept on; but the best of all, and what made me and Katy come to Miss Percival was, Katy went down cellar to get the vegetables for dinner, and I was in the kitchen cleaning the knives, when just as she got down, she give an awful screech, and hollered, 'Susan!' twice over as quick as she could fetch her breath; so I, not thinking of what it was, and so not looking for anything, run down, and there was the cook all of a heap at the foot of the stairs, and right before her, not two yards off, there was the ugliest, hatefullest old woman that ever you see, setting on a wash-tub turned bottom side up, and she a-sticking her hands into her sides, and staring at Katy, and grinning, as they say, like a chess-i-cat."

"Did you go up to her?"

"No, indeed, sir, I was too scared for fear she'd come up to me to stop long where I was. I just hawled Katy up by an arm, and we both took up them stairs as if the old creeter was after us—which I don't know but what she was *him*," added Susan, in an awe-stricken tone, at which neither of her auditors could refrain from smiling.

"Well, is that all?" inquired Percival, as the little maid ceased.

"Yes, sir. So soon as me and Katy got up stairs, we came to the sitting-room, and told Miss Percival that we couldn't stay noway; and we'll like it, sir, if we could be sent over to the stage tavern to-night, for we darsn't, either of us, stay another night in the house."

"But you wouldn't go and leave us without anybody in the house, not even a dinner prepared!" expostulated Miss Matilda; and Percival added,

"No, Susan, you never could be so disobliging, I am sure; and if you will stay until to-morrow morning, I will give you each five dollars, and pay your expenses back to town."

Susan hesitated; she was not insensible to her young master's flattering appeal, still less could she deny the charms of five dollars for one day's work; but, excepting love, terror is the most absorbing, and the most selfish of passions; and weighed against it, Susan's allegiance and Susan's avarice kicked the beam, and shaking her head, she muttered,

"I darsn't, sir—I darsn't, nohow."

"And you absolutely insist upon going to-night?" demanded Percival, sternly.

"Yes, sir. We'll get dinner and clear away; but we want to leave by five o'clock in the afternoon."

"Very well. Of course, you expect no wages, and you will be obliged to pay nearly three dollars for your traveling expenses; but you shall go, if you wish. If you conclude to accept my first offer, and stay until to-morrow morning, you still have the opportunity, and may avail of it at any time before five o'clock."

Susan shook her head.

"No, sir, I'm much obliged to you; but I wouldn't stop for ten dollars. I darsn't, noways."

"Very well. You may go down stairs, Susan."

And Susan went. As the door closed, Walton turned to his aunt, and raising his eyebrows, asked,

"Could I have fought the battle any better?"

"No, I don't see that you could—but what is to be done?"

"We must think about it; and you had better see if the cook is not open to the bribe that little wretch refused. Then we must call Mrs. Nancy to council."

"Ugh!" shivered Miss Matilda. "I hate to speak to that creature. She is the worst thing that haunts the house, after all."

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CHAPTER VIII.

But Mrs. Nancy, when called to council, proved as impracticable as before, merely shaking her head, and muttering something about a pack of fools.

"But if these girls go, Mrs. Nancy, whom can we find to do the housework?" anxiously inquired Miss Percival, too distressed to be indignant.

"I suppose you will have to do it yourselves, except what I can do, which isn't much. Mrs. Bartram and I didn't have all this fuss and parade that you do—and we got along well enough. I suppose you can do so, too, if you try," replied Nancy, ungraciously. "Or, if you can't, you can go away," added she, turning toward her own room.

"My nephew and Miss Thorne have to stay here, and, of course, I must stay with them," replied Miss Matilda, with dignity.

"But the other girl and man needn't, need they?" asked the old woman, with a sneer, very trying even to Miss Percival's meek temper; so much so, in fact, that she returned without reply to her own room, where she acquainted her nephew with the ill-result of her interview.

"Well, never mind, aunt Mat," replied that young gentleman, with a sort of indefinite attempt at cheerfulness, "we'll weather it somehow. Don't say anything to the girls or the captain just yet."

The hours passed, and no signs of concession from the mutineers, no signs of rescue from other quarters; and at three o'clock Mr. Percival went out to the stable to inform Ichabod that he was to drive the two women and their luggage to Glynn that evening at five.

"Yes, sir, I know," replied Ichabod, gravely. "They was telling me, sir, that they was afeard o' the spooks."

"Afraid of their own shadows, you had better say," replied Percival, whose temper had become slightly ruffled in the course of the day.

Ichabod, who was cleaning a harness, looked shrewdly up, then down again, and rubbed the brass P. upon the blinder as bright as a mirror before he replied.

"Well, sir, I'm not so clear as to that. I shouldn't wonder if it was more than their shadows the lasses see."

"Pho! You are not getting frightened, too, I hope?"

"No, sir, I'm not getting frightened, too," slowly replied Ichabod. "It takes a goodish bit to frighten me; though, perhaps, somebody else had better say it for me; and I have no intention of quitting until you do, sir, if there's a dozen old women instead of one trying to drive me off. But women, sir, you know, are different; and we'd ought to make allowances."

"Yes, yes; but after the allowances are made, Ichabod, who is to do the work of the house? That is what my aunt and I are anxious to know," replied Percival, impatiently.

"Well, sir"—and Ichabod paused to take another dip of water, and another dab of whiting upon his polishing-cloth before he continued—"I was going to say, sir, that there'll be no use in getting another pair of women to be scared off just as them are, for we couldn't keep 'em, nor they couldn't keep the story, and the house would get a bad name. So, sir, if you and the ladies, and the other gentleman, was a mind to rough it a little, and sort of camp out, as it were, without much ceremony, why, I'm considerable of a cook, sir, and I'd take hold, and do my best in the kitchen and stable, and maybe the ladies, among them, could manage the fancy jobs, like setting out the table, and fixing up their own rooms; and I suppose that old woman would give us a helping hand now and then; and so, sir"——

The dinner-bell cut short the amplification of Ichabod's idea; but Mr. Percival had already seized it, and exclaimed triumphantly,

"That is a capital plan, Ichabod, and by it we get rid of all the trouble and mortification of going through the same scene with another set of servants which we have with these. I, for one, am quite willing to rough it, as you say; and an old sailor like Capt. Page will be a capital ally. As for the ladies, we must contrive to spare them everything but the ornamental part of the work; and I don't doubt they will be as much pleased as I am."

The result proved Mr. Percival a true prophet, for when, at dinner-time, he informed his guests that the servile insurrection of the morning had ended in revolution, and that they were now reduced to the condition of the French aristocracy, after the Reign of Terror, and were, in fact, to become their own servants, the announcement was received with exclamations of mirth and satisfaction.

"I have long been certain that I had a talent for house-maid's work, and I shall now undertake it," said Rosamond, gayly.

"And I should like to lay the table, and put the parlors to right, and make things pretty, generally," said Delia, slowly, looking about the dismally decorous room, with its formal, old-fashioned furniture and dingy draperies.

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"And I shall overlook Ichabod, and help the house-maid," said aunt Matilda.

"And we must 'stand-by' to pull and haul generally, Percival," said Capt. Page.

In fact, all were ready and willing; all, except the housekeeper, who, solemn and silent in her place at the head of the table, neither spoke or looked the slightest notice of anything that passed. Neither eating, drinking, or speaking, she performed the services of the table like an automaton; and so soon as the dinner was ended retired to her own room.

"It seems rather droll for the only servant in the house to be the only person who is to do nothing," remarked Walton Percival, in a low tone to his aunt.

"And why does she sit at the head of the table?" asked Delia, a little superciliously.

"Mrs. Bartram directed that she should remain, and should have that room, and sit at the table with us. It is rather unpleasant to be sure, but——"

And Miss Matilda broke off with the distressed expression she was rather apt to wear.

"Do you find it unpleasant?" asked Rosamond, brightly, "Now I think it is quite amusing to see her. She is so like a wax figure, and keeps that solemn expression through everything so perfectly. And then, cousin Matilda, she certainly relieves you of the trouble of pouring coffee and tea, and helping to pudding. We will consider that to be her duty. But who clears off the table?"

"Susan will do it to-day," replied Miss Matilda, ringing the bell. "We will not display our new arrangements to the admiring eyes of the rebels, but to-morrow we must settle the question in earnest."

"Allow me to volunteer," said Capt. Page. "I will make it my regular duty to remove the courses, bring whatever may be needed in the course of the meal, and clear the table at the end."

"A vote of thanks to the captain: but as virtue is its own reward, he will have the pleasure of being associated with the fair parlor-maid, who will have to assist in the more esthetic portions of the service. Ah! that I had spoken in time! I suppose, Page, there is no hope of persuading you to relinquish the office!" exclaimed Percival.

"Not the least," replied the captain, laughingly; while Delia blushed, glanced timidly at Percival, and when his eye was upon her, looked deprecatingly at Rosamond, who was smiling just a little scornfully, and at Miss Percival, who was decidedly frowning.

The dinner ended rather hurriedly, as the maids were anxious to be off, and Miss Percival was resolved to exact the last possible moment of service from them; and the young people adjourned to the lawn for another game of croquet. They were still engaged in it, when the light wagon came round to the side-door, received the two women and their trunks, and drove rapidly away.

"Hurrah for independence! Down with the tyrants, and every man his own servant!" exclaimed Rosamond, whirling her mallet above her head, as the wagon passed out of sight; and her companions echoed her sentiment as merrily and as heartily as it was uttered.

Another game, and Miss Matilda appeared at the door to say,

"We dined so early that Ichabod and I thought it best to have a tea-time, and everything is ready. Will you come in?"

The tea proved a substantial one, consisting of hot short-cakes, dipped toast, stewed rhubarb, and various little side-dishes, whose composition none undertook to explain.

It was eaten merrily and with appetite, and a vote of compliment to Ichabod unanimously passed. At the close of the meal, Capt. Page commenced his duties by placing the dishes upon a table, which Ichabod had set ready for them in the lobby; and Delia, with many pretty preparations, such as a dainty, little white apron, sleeves turned back from her handsome hands, water brought from the kitchen by Capt. Page, and towel and soap found by Percival, who also collected the teacups and spoons for her, proceeded to wash the delicate old China, and set it by in the closet. Rosamond volunteered to help also; but finding that Delia preferred her other assistants, withdrew to the door-step, where she sat with a book upon her knee, and her head upon her hand, making a very pretty picture in the sunset, and herself all unconscious of the effect.

Later, came some games of cards, a little reading aloud, much merry talk; and then the family separated for their own rooms, Percival contriving to give Rosamond a look of reminder as she passed him, to which she replied with a nod.

In their own room, Delia professing herself tired to death, undressed at once and lay down in bed. Rosamond moved about the room for awhile, and then shading the lamp from her sister's eyes, sat down beside it with a book. Delia stared in surprise.

"Why, aren't you coming to bed, Rosamond?"

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"Not quite yet, I am not sleepy, and I want to finish this book. The light doesn't trouble you, does it?"

"Oh, no! Only I should think you would be tired, and want to sleep."

"By-and-by. Go to sleep yourself and get rested for your labors of to-morrow," said Rosamond, feeling a little remorseful at thought of deceiving her sister. Della said no more, and after a few moments slept soundly. Rosamond read on, although her eyes passed over the words with only the vaguest idea of their meaning, and wandered incessantly to her watch, placed in its stand beside the lamp. At last the hands pointed to twelve, and rising softly, Rosamond laid down her book, and noiselessly stepped across the room, having taken the precaution to change her boots for soft slippers when she first came up stairs. The handle of the door turned noiselessly, the hinges did not creak, and Rosamond stood in the corridor, her heart throbbing painfully, her breath seeming to die away in her throat, and her fingers cold and trembling.

"What a fool I am!" thought she, and softly closed the door behind her, and remained in the utter darkness waiting for a sign. Some one stood beside her, and silently led the way toward the great hall in the center of the house. Rosamond as silently followed, and on emerging from the corridor into the gallery surrounding the hall, was able to perceive that her conductor was a man, but, as it seemed to her, taller and larger than Percival. Could it be Capt. Page—and if so? Rosamond blushed scarlet in the darkness, and pausing, murmured,

"Walton, is that you?"

The figure turned, came slowly toward her, and stopped so close that her half-extended hand would have met his. By the dim starlight Rosamond eagerly scanned his face; it was not Walton's; it was not Capt. Page's; it was that of a stranger—of a tall, dark man, with a stern and melancholy face, and eyes that seemed to appeal with even piteous earnestness to hers. Strangest of all, he was dressed in the costume of thirty years back!

A heavy shiver ran through Rosamond's frame, and staggering against the wall, she covered her face with her hands.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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TWO WAYS OF LOOKING AT A THING.: I.--HIS STORY.
BY A NEW CONTRIBUTOR.
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pg. 138

TWO WAYS OF LOOKING AT A THING.

BY A NEW CONTRIBUTOR.

I.—HIS STORY.

It had been very hot all day, and now the clouds were scudding over the sky, bringing a refreshing coolness with them, as well as the prospect of a speedy rain.

Father declared it would storm before morning, and the hay must be got in; so there was nothing for it but that Dan and I should buckle to, and get it in that night. So at it we went, pitching the hay into the rack with a celerity that spoke strength of muscle, at least.

And when we drove up to the barn with the first load, there was cousin Jean up in the hay-mow hunting for eggs. We drove up until the fragrant load was only a little way below her. Spying us, she came to the very edge of the great window.

"Oh, Dan! let me jump!" she cried, eagerly, all ready to spring at the first word of assent.

"Come," he said, stretching up his arms to her, and she threw herself down with an impetus that flung both off their balance to sink in the slippery, treacherous material; but in a moment Jean was up again laughing merrily.

How she worked with us to get it in, her little white hands grasping the fork with such force, making vigorous plunges, and leading one to think she was going to raise at least a quarter of the load at once; and succeeding so far as to fish up a few meagre wisps of hay, which a horse that was dying of starvation wouldn't turn his head to look at.

But she worked busily on, nevertheless, while merry jokes and laughter were constantly flying between her and Dan; and all the still air around echoed to the sound of their light laughter.

I watched them furtively—those two; it seemed to me there must be some secret understanding between them. How Jean would laugh and pout all in a breath, as it were, and talk with Dan, sometimes teasing, sometimes scolding in serio-comic style, which brought a smile even to my sober face; then petting him in such a way as fairly drove me frantic, until at last I climbed up in the mow with my fork, and left them to have it out to themselves.

Once or twice, when she was at the merriest, I had caught her eye, and she suddenly sobered for a moment, while she flushed scarlet; I do not know why, I'm sure. I hope I didn't look reproving; but the fact is, I ought not to be round with gay, young folks—my sober face seems to act like a constant check upon them. Not that I am so very much older, for I am but four years Dan's senior, he being twenty-three; but then Jean is only nineteen; and I suppose I seem very old to her.

Ah, well! I wonder if she remembers when she used to live with us years ago. She was not our own cousin; but she never knew the difference, because she was so young when aunt Margaret died, and she came to live with us. She was a little, loving, clinging thing, and we were very fond of her. I wonder if she remembers how she used to follow me around the house and farm; how, the moment I seated myself, she would climb on my knee, winding her arms round my neck, and lay her little golden head on my shoulder. I was fifteen, then, and she was only seven. Perhaps she does not remember, but then she used to think there was no one like cousin Malcolm! She and Dan were forever quarreling. They could never agree for an hour.

And how she used to tell me all her little troubles. If her doll, or any of her playthings, was broken, it was always laid carefully by until cousin Malcolm got home. Then she was sure it would be mended, if that were possible; or, if not, it would be replaced by something else. I used to spend nearly all my pocket-money, in those days, for my little golden-haired Jean, and enjoyed it best that way.

How happy she was when mother allowed her to hem a handkerchief for me. She would sit in her low rocking-chair, and stitch away with her little mouth pursed up, and unaccustomed wrinkles in her sunny brow, taking each stitch with a tremulous exactness, examining it on both sides to see that it was only barely visible; refusing to go and play, or rest from her labor at all, until the momentous affair was accomplished. Then how she flushed up, and how delighted she looked at my praise, fully believing me when I said that it was hemmed so very nicely, that I must only carry it on the greatest possible occasions.

Oh! I know she loved me then; and when, after her eighth birthday, her uncle sent for

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her to go with them to the West, there was no one in the family from whom she parted with such bitter tears as from me.

How well I recall that day! Kind as my father and mother had always been to her, and dearly as she loved them, she parted from them with many tears, it is true, but with a tolerable degree of composure. Dan she left with a cool kiss and touch of the hand.

But I had withdrawn to the kitchen. I was old enough and manly enough to be ashamed of tears, and I could not keep them back; still I was resolved no one should see them save my little cousin, for whom they were shed.

I stood leaning against the window wiping my eyes, when I heard her light step.

"Oh, Malcolm!" she cried, "I do feel *so* bad;" and in a moment she was clinging to my neck, crying as though her heart would break.

At that my sham manliness forsook me, and I broke down utterly; so we mingled our tears together, with promises never, never to forget each other.

"And remember, Malcolm"—these were her parting words—"I am your own little sister, and I shall come back here some time and live with you. I shall always love you best of anybody in the world, you have been so good to me, you best of brothers!"

How distinctly I remember her very words, although it is twelve years ago.

I wonder if she has forgot the parting present she made me—a pin-cushion, elaborately embroidered in gay colors with the words, "Remember me," put in (with infinite pains, as mother told me afterward) with pins by her own little fingers. I have the little cushion still. It is one of my dearest treasures. Would she recognize it! I mean she shall see it some day, and then how narrowly I will watch her to notice if she betrays any consciousness.

But it is silly to recall all these things. Of course, she doesn't remember any of them. I wonder how far back young ladies like her can recollect. Let me see! she was eight, then. Now I remember things that happened before I was seven; indeed, I recollect distinctly when grandfather died, and all about it, and I was then only six years old.

But I imagine men have longer memories than women. At least, I am sure I remember better than she does.

And to see what good friends she and Dan are; and, in fact, have been from the moment she entered the house, nearly five weeks ago. They never quarrel now, or, rather, they only do so in jest; and the "making up" is the bitter part of it to me. The end of it all is plain.

How I had longed to see the child, and through all these years of separation how I had thought and thought of her. When the letter came announcing her coming, how excited I was. Dan talked the most about it: but I am sure I thought most.

Neither shall I ever forget that night she came. We were just coming from the field, Dan and I, when we saw the stage far down the road. Dan had taken the precaution to have his coat with him, but I was in my shirt-sleeves.

Somehow I had thought of her always as a child. Grown, of course, she would be, but still she would be a child; and I rushed forward as eagerly as Dan, and outstripped him before we got to the road, so that I stood there waiting, even before the stage drove up; then Dan came behind me, breathless.

I stepped forward eagerly, and so did he, when the driver opened the door, and then! Why then—nothing! Only, instead of a child in golden ringlets, there was a fashionable young lady, stylish beyond any one who had ever greeted my eyes.

I thought, this surely cannot be Jean; but she instantly put out her little gloved hand to Dan with a smile, and said,

"It is cousin Malcolm, I am sure! You see how quick I am to recognize you!" She never glanced at me; but I had stepped aside quickly enough at her first words. Oh! I had forgotten what had altered me! No wonder she didn't notice me! This hideous scar was not here twelve years ago.

Well, I rushed round to the back door, and up to my room, thoroughly disgusted with everything, feeling as though I would like to hide my head forever—all had been so different from what I had anticipated.

But when mother called me to supper, I summoned up all my pride, and tried to "fix up" a little, although it was with a very faint heart I did so, and went down.

There she was sitting between father and Dan, who both watched her every movement with looks that spoke volumes.

"Here's Malcolm," said father, as I came into the room. "Malcolm, you remember your little favorite, Jean!"

I saw her start; the color flashed up redly into her face, then retreated, leaving her very pale. I knew what startled her—of course, I did; but we shook hands, murmured something, I know not what; and then, to my relief, Dan

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went on talking in his lively, rattling strain, and no more notice was taken of me.

I caught her looking at me at the tea-table, however—not once or twice, but often; and always when my eye met hers, she would turn that vivid scarlet, and look away. I saw plainly that she was shocked, and yet she pitied me. I didn't want her pity! I felt savage, and I suppose I looked so, which called forth the pleasant remark from Dan, "Mal isn't always the bear he is to-night," which, for want of a rejoinder, drove me from the table.

Five weeks ago, and yet matters are no better. I had thought she would get used to it—that when she heard the whole story, for I knew mother would be sure to tell it—perhaps she might forget my looks, and like me a little in spite of them.

But no; she never jests with me—never indulges me in those pretty, little familiarities she lavishes so freely on father and Dan.

How charming she is when she lights father's pipe for him! How bewitching when she arranges Dan's curly locks, as he often begs her to do; in fact, everything she does is done in such a way that I cannot help looking for my life. Indeed, I look too much for my peace of mind, for I see plainly how it will all end.

Once, when she was playing with Dan's hair, he said, half laughing, "Why, Jean, you ought to take Malcolm in hand, too—you could hide part of that scar on his temple, I dare say, you are such a skillful hair-dresser!"

I saw her shudder, or tremble. It was the idea of touching this unsightly scar, I know, and I spoke immediately, "No, thank you, our cousin's hands are already full, I should judge;" and left the room abruptly, thus strengthening her in the opinion that she must already have formed, that I am a brute!

Well, well, I may learn to bear these things better one day. When the end comes, I must learn.

II.—HER STORY.

AH, me! I wonder what is the matter with me! Why don't I feel like my old self. It seems as though I never felt happy now-a-days!

Even, when I laugh the most with Dan, it isn't me that laughs, it is only my face. I have a dreary feeling at my heart, all the while, that I cannot account for.

I had so longed all these years to get back to this dear old farm. I had dreamed of it by night and by day for so long. And I had thought I should be so happy if I once got back here. But I am not—no, I am not happy at all. Perhaps, if Malcolm would be like he used to be, I should feel differently. If he would only treat me as the rest do, I think—yes, I know I should be happy. But he will not; he never will, I think. He has forgotten, it is evident. But how could he forget? He was older than I—eight years my senior. It must be that boys forget sooner than girls.

It seems to me that I have never got over the pang I felt the first night I came; I can scarcely think of it now without tears.

I believe I had really fancied myself still a child until that night. I knew I had grown tall, of course; but my heart was as childish as ever; and I felt such a longing to see Malcolm's dear face. I really thought—I can speak of it now that everything is so different from what I had fancied—I really thought he would fold his arms about me, and kiss me, as uncle and aunt did. Even Dan kissed me; but then I thought he was Malcolm when he did so. How absurd in me to have mistaken Dan's good-natured face, which has a certain animal beauty in it, 'tis true, but no *soul*, for Malcolm's noble features—and that reminds me. Aunt says he is very sensitive about the scars on his face; how can he be? He ought to be proud of them; I should be, if he were my—— if he were anything to me, I am sure, when I remembered how he came by them. He got them by saving his mother's life—she told me all about it; how she had neglected to fill a little lamp they needed to carry about the house; of her attempting to fill it, standing, as she supposed, at a safe distance from the burning candle; how the oil in the can caught fire, and blazed in every direction, burning poor aunt Elsie; and how, at her first cry, Malcolm came rushing out, and flinging off his coat, enveloped her in it so closely, that it smothered the blaze about her at once. By great exertion he succeeded in extinguishing the blazing oil; but he burned his own face and hands—and he will carry the scars to his grave. But they are honorable scars; and I, for one, love him all the better for them.

Dan says that on the never-to-be-forgotten night when I arrived here, Malcolm was at the stage-door to meet me, too. I am sure he couldn't have been—I should certainly have known him anywhere, in spite of the scars. I never could have mistaken Dan for him, had they been together.

I know he thinks me silly and thoughtless, talking as I do with Dan; but I must do something, or my heart will break. He does not like me, it is evident; why, I cannot tell. I know he used to be very fond of me once.

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Now, yesterday, when we were getting in the hay, how sober Malcolm was; not a word for me—not a smile; yet he can smile, he can be tender.

I saw him the other night when he didn't know I was near. He said he felt like taking a lunch before retiring; and his mother jumped with great alacrity to wait upon him—for Malcolm's will is law with her. They went into the kitchen, and I was left alone; but the door swung open, and I could not help seeing and hearing. How merry he was with her; how I longed to be out there, too.

Nevertheless, I noiselessly changed my seat then. I didn't like them to see that I had been a witness to what had been said and done. I wouldn't have him know for the world that I was fairly homesick, to rush out there, as I would have done twelve years ago, and seat myself on his knee, sure of a welcome, and be talked to, and petted, and amused, as he, and he alone, could do in the way I liked.

But, no; all advances must come from him. I haven't forgotten my parting words to him; if he cares for me, he has not forgotten them; so why does he treat me so coldly?

Oh! I fear I am not a welcome guest in this house to Malcolm! I have not forgotten what Dan told me of the young lady from the city, who boarded here one summer. She and Malcolm were "great friends," he said. That accounts, I think, for it all.

I see plainly what the end will be; and when Malcolm gets married, this will no longer be a home for me. Yet even this does not explain to me why he should dislike me so much.

Now, the other day I was brushing Dan's hair, as I often do, when he said, thoughtlessly, that I ought to be Malcolm's hair-dresser, so that the scar on his temple might be covered. I saw plainly his gesture of repugnance, and saying coldly that he thought my hands full already, he went out of the room, to avoid any officious advances on my part, I suppose. But he need not have been afraid. I would never, never do it, however much I might like it, except he asked me.

I would not have him guess that his love would be more to me than that of the whole world beside; that I am hungering and thirsting for it—in the old way, I mean; to have him call me, as he used, his little Jean, his pet!

III.—HIS STORY AGAIN.

SOMETHING entirely unlooked for has come to pass. And this is how it happened. Father and Dan had gone into town. It had been a very hot day, and I came home early from the field, tired, and feeling the need of rest.

Mother and Jean were sitting in the shade, on the front steps, with their work; and I soon joined them there with my newspaper, talking and reading by them. I can talk when mother is by. She is so fond of me that I always feel, when I am with her, as though I was still "somewhat," in spite of my face. And constantly I met Jean's eyes fixed upon my face, but instantly withdrawn as my eye met hers. I do not know why, but the pertinacity with which she avoided my gaze, instead of depressing me, as it had always done before, seemed to stir my heart in some mysterious way, and make my pulses thrill.

If she is simply indifferent, I thought, she certainly would not behave like this; and if she dislikes me, she would not look at me at all.

Soon mother went in to see about supper, refusing Jean's offers of help; she told her to "stay and entertain Malcolm," which called a blush to the fair cheek, as she hesitatingly resumed her seat, glancing shyly at me.

As for me, a new spirit had taken possession of me, so that I scarcely knew myself. I felt a certain audacity and recklessness which had been strangers to me for a long time.

"Come," I said, folding my arms, and leaning lazily back against the door-post, as I watched her, "mother says you are to entertain me. Please proceed."

She gave a swift little glance at me, and then my unwonted spirits seemed to infect her, for she answered gayly,

"That's not etiquette; I am 'the company,' consequently, *I* am the one to be entertained."

"But I must obey my mother," I answered, stoutly, "and her commands were for me to be entertained. Therefore, I shall wait."

Perfectly at ease in her presence for the first time since she came, I sat looking at her with a mixture of mirth and wistfulness, which the gathering darkness may have half concealed.

"What shall I say, then?" in her very old tone of childish *naivete*—a tone she had not used to me since she came.

"I shall not instruct you! Teaching is poor entertainment," I answered, with mock gravity; "besides, I think it is a new idea for a fashionable young lady, versed in etiquette, and acquainted with the usages of society, to come for instruction in conversation to a rough farmer like me! I thought it was natural to young ladies—born in them—to know just what to say on all possible occasions. *I* am the one who should be at a loss."

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For answer, Jean remarked quietly that she really was not posted upon the habits of fashionable young ladies, she had never inquired into them. And then there came a pause, until Jean broke out abruptly and half pettishly with,

"I wish I wasn't a young lady. There!"

I opened my eyes in astonishment.

"Why, Jean, do you wish that?" I asked, softly, after a moment, drawing nearer to her, for there was a little trembling hope tugging at my heart, and begging to come in.

She did not answer; she had covered her face with her hands.

"Do you really mean it?" I asked, half incredulously. "Were you happier as a child than now? You and Dan used to quarrel a deal, I remember—now you are excellent friends. Hadn't you forgotten that?"

She shook her head petulantly, and I saw her red lips pouting disdainfully, for my little Jean was no saint—she was only a loveable, willful girl, who, to me at least, embodied all that the best woman is by nature, both saint and sinner.

"You and I used to be very good friends," I went on, watching her as I spoke; "indeed, I thought you were fond of me when you were a child. I wonder, if you were one now, if you could like me as you used, in spite of this;" and I touched my temple and cheek with my finger as I spoke.

Still she did not answer. I knew, however, that she understood me. Her very silence encouraged me.

"Stay here a moment, Jean," I whispered; and I leaped up the stairs three at a time, went to my chamber, and back again in a moment. I laid a little package, wrapped in tissue-paper, in her lap. "Do you remember that?" I said.

She opened the package with trembling fingers; there lay the little pin-cushion just as her tiny fingers had fashioned it long years ago; its mandate still untouched, although the pins had grown black and rusty from disuse.

She looked at it one moment, gave a little cry; and then down went her brown head upon it, hiding her face from my view.

A sudden tremor shook me from head to foot. Still I hardly dared believe such great happiness was in store for me. I bent over her, and took her pretty brown head gently between my hands. I had determined now, whatever came, to know my fate.

She blushed violently, but did not resist as I lifted the drooping face so that I could look in her eyes.

"Little Jean," I said, tenderly, "I have obeyed, to the letter, the words on that cushion. I have never forgotten you for an hour; no, not for a moment. Even in my dreams you were present with me. How I longed for your coming, and how eagerly I ran to meet you that night you came! But I saw at once that you did not remember me. You mistook Dan's healthful, handsome face for my poor scarred one. I had forgotten how fearfully I was altered, and I rushed away, and up to my room without making myself known. When I *did* meet you, I saw a look of repulsion on your expressive face. Your feelings were changed. In place of the love you had for me, aversion, I feared, dwelt in your heart. To-night is the first time I have dared to hope. Tell me, oh! tell me, am I deceiving myself? Have pity on me, and speak!"

I stopped, breathless, waiting tremblingly to hear her answer.

"Oh, Malcolm! how could you?" she whispered. "If anything could make you dearer to me than you always were, it is this, and the knowledge of how it came;" and she laid her tiny hand on my poor scarred face.

"Here I set my seal!" she added, and lifting her head, no longer blushing, but with a face radiant with happiness, she pressed her dear lips to the unsightly spot.

I had found my love. Henceforward we go, hand-in-hand, as of old, but far more peaceful and happy.

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A NITE OF TRUBBLES.
B Y JOSIAH ALLEN'S WIFE.
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A NITE OF TRUBBLES.

BY JOSIAH ALLEN'S WIFE.

TRULY last nite wuz a nite ov trubbles with us. We wuz kept awok all the fore part ov the nite with cats fitein—it duz beet all how they went on, how menny there wuz ov them—I dont no—Josiah thought there wuz upwards ov 50—I myself made a kalm estimate ov between 3 and 4. But I tell u they went in strong, what there wuz ov em. What under heavens they found to talk about so long, and in such unearthly voices, iz a mystery 2 me. u couldn't sleep no more then ez if u wuz in Pandemonium, and about 11 I guess it wuz, I herd Thomas Jefferson holler out ov his chamber winder,

"U hev preached long enuff brothers on that text—Ill put in a seventhly fer u" and then I herd a brick fall. "Uve protracted ure meetin here plenty long enuff. u may adjurn now to somebody elses winder and exhort them a spell." then I herd another brick fall. "Now I wonder if u'll kum round on this circuit agin rite away." His room is rite over ourn, and I raised up in end ov the bed—and hollered out to him to "stop his noise." but Josiah sed—"Do let him be, do let him kill the old creeters, I am wore out"

Sez I "Josiah I dont mind his killin the cats—but I wont have him talken about their holdin a protracted meeten, and preechin, I wont have it" sez I.

"Wall sez he Do lay down, the most I care fer is to get rid ov the cats"

Sez I "U do have wicked streaks Josiah, and the way u let that boy go on is awful—sez I where do u think u will go to Josiah Allen?"

Sez he, "I shall go into another bed if u cant stop talkin, I hev been kept awoke till midnite by them creeters, and now u want to finish the nite."

Josiah is a real even tempered man—but nothin makes him so kinder fretful az to be kept awoke by cats, and it is awful—awfuly mysterious 2. For sumtimes az u listen, u say wildly to urself—how kan a animal so small giv utteranse to a noise so large, large enuff fer a elifant. Then sumtimes agin u will git enkouraged thinkin that last yawl has realy finished em—fer u think they are at rest, and better off than they kan be here in this world utterin such deathly and terrific shrieks—and u no u are happier. So u will be real enkouraged, and begin to get sleepy—when they'l break out agin all ov a sudden seemin to say up in a small fine voice—"we wont go home till mornin" drawin out the "mornin" in the most threatnin and insultin manner, and then a great hoarse grum voice will take it up—"We Wont Go Home Till Mornin." and then they will spit fiercely, and shriek out the appaulin words both togather. It iz diskouragin and I couldn't deny it, so I lay down, and we both went to sleep.

I had'nt more then got into a nap when Josiah waked me up groanin. And sez he "Them darned cats are at it agin."

Wall sez I "U neednt swear so if they be" I listened a minute and sez I—"it aint cats"

Sez he—"It iz"

Sez I "Josiah Allen I no better—it aint cats"

"Wall What is it," sez he "if it haint"

I sot up on end ov the bed, and push'd back my nite cap from my left ear and listened and sez I "It is a akordeun"

"How kum a akordeun under our winder" sez he "Sez I, 'It is Augustus Peedick scranadin Tirzah and he has got under the rong winder'" He leaped out ov bed and started for the door.

Sez I "Josiah Allen kum back here this minute—sez I do u realize ure kondishun, sez I u aint dressed"

He seezed his hat from the buro and put it on his hed and went on. Sez I "Josiah Allen if u go to the door in that kondishun ill prosikute u, What do u meen actin so to nite? sez I u wuz young once urself."

"I wuzznt a konfounded fool, if I wus young"—sez he.

Sez I "kum back to bed Josiah Allen! do u want to get the Peedicks'es and Dobbs'es mad at u. I should think u wud be ashamed swearin and actin as u hev to nite, and sez I u will get ure deth cold standin there without ure kloze on. kum back to bed this minute Josiah Allen"

It aint often I set up, but when I do Josiah knows I will be minded, so finaly he took off his hat and kum back to bed. and there we had to lay and listen. not 1 word could Tirzah

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hear, fer her room is clear to the other end ov the house—and such a time as I had to keep Josiah in the bed. The first he played wus what they call an involuntary, and I konfess it did sound like a cat, before they get to spittin and tearin out fur u no they'l go on kinder melankolly. He went on in that wa fer a length ov time which I cant set down with any kind ov akuracy, Josiah thinks it wuz about 2 hours and a ½, I myself dont believe it wuz more than a ¼ ov an hour. Finaly he broke out singin a tune the korus ov which wuz— "

Oh think ov me—Oh think ov me.

"No danger ov our not thinken on u" sez Josiah—"no danger on it." It wuz a long peece and he played and sung it in a slow and affecten manner. he then played and sung the follering

Kum oh kum with me. Miss Allen
The moon is beeming
Oh Tirzah kum with me
The stars are gleen.ing
All around is bright
With beauty teeming
Moonlight hours, in my opinion
Iz the time fer love.

My skiff is by the shore
She's light, she's free
To ply the feathered oar Miss Allen,
Would be joy to me
And as we glide along,
My song shall be
(If you'l excuse the liberty Tirzah)
I love but thee.

Tra la la Miss Tirzah
Tra la la Miss Allen
Tra la la tra la la
My dear young maid.

He then broke out into another piece the chorus of which wuz

Curb oh curb thy bosoms pain
Ill kum again—Ill kum again

"No u wont" sez Josiah "u wont never get away, I *will* get up Samanthee"

Sez I in low but awful accents, "Josiah Allen if u make another move I'll part with u," sez I "it does beet all how u keep actin to nite, haint it az hard fer me az it iz fer u?" Sez I "du u think it iz eny kumfert fur me to lay here and hear it?" Sez I "that iz jest the wa with u men, u haint no more patience than nothin in the world—u wuz young once yourself."

"Throw that in my face agin will u? What if I wuz! Oh do hear him go on" sez he shakin his fist, "hear him agin—'curb oh curb thy bosoms pain' If I wuz out there my young feller I would give u a pain u couldnt curb so easy—though it might not be in your bosom."

Sez I "Josiah Allen u have showed more wickedness to nite than I thought u had in u"—Sez I "would u like to have ure pasture—and Deacon Todd and Sister Graves, hear ure revengful threats? if u wuz layin helpless on a sick bed—would u be throwin your arms about—and shakin your fist in that way?" Sez I "it scares me to think a pardner of mine should keep actin as u have, sez I u have fell 25 cents in my estimation to nite."

"Wall" sez he "what kumfert is there in his prowlin round here, makin two old folks lay all nite in perfect agony"

"It haint much after midnite, and if it wuz," sez I in a deep and majestic tone—"Do u kalculate Josiah Allen, to go through life without any trouble? if u do u will find yourself mistaken." Sez I, "Do be still."

"I wont be still, Samantha."

Jest then he begun a neu piece durin which the akordeun sounded the most melankolly and cast down it had as yet, and his voice wuz solemn and affectin. I never thought much ov Augustus Peedick, he is Thomas Jefferson's age, about 17, his moustash is if possible thinner than hisen. I should say whiter—only that is a impossibility, He is jest the age when he wants to be older, and when folks are willin he should, for u dont want to call him Mr. Peedick, and to call him bub as u always have, he takes as a dedly insult. He thinks he is in love with Tirzah which is jest as bad as long as it lasts, ez if he wuz—jest as painful to him, and to her. As I said he sung these words in a mournful and affectin manner.

When I think ov thee thou lovely dame,
I feel so weak and overcame,
That tears would burst from my eyelid,
Did not my stern manhood forbid;
For Tirzah Ann,
I am a melankolly man.

I skorn my looks—what are nu hats
To such a wretch—or silks cravats;
My feelins prey to such extents
Vittles are of no konsequence;
Oh Tirzah Ann,
I am a melankolly man.

As *he* waited on you from spellin skool
My anguish spurned all curb and rule,
My manhood cried be calm! forbear!
Else I should have tore out my hair,
For Tirzah Ann—
I wuz a melankolly man.

As I walked behind he little nu,
What danger did his steps pursue;
I had no dagger to unsheath,
But fiercely did I grate my teeth.
For Tirzah Ann—
I wuz a melankolly man.

I'm wasten slow, my last years vests,
Hang loose on me—my nightly rests
Are thin as gauze,—and thoughts ov u,
Gashes em madly through and through.
Oh Tirzah Ann,
I am a melankolly man.

My heart is in such burning state,
I feel it soon must conflagrate;
But ere I go to be a gost,
What bliss, couldst thou tel me thou dost
Sweet Tirzah Ann,
Think of this melankolly man.

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He didnt sing but 1 piece more after this I dont remember the words for it wuz a long piece. Josiah insists that it wuz as long as Miltons Paradise Lost

Sez I "dont be a fool Josiah u never read it"

Sez he "I hev hefted the book and no the size ov it—and I no it wuz as long if not longer"

Sez I agin, in a kool kollected manner—"Dont be a fool Josiah, there wuzzent more than 25 or 30 verses at the outside." That wuz when we wuz talkin it over to the breakfast table this mornin, but I konfess it did seem awful long, there in the ded ov nite; though I wouldnt encourage Josiah by sayin so, he loves to have his own hed now, and I dont no what he would be if I enkouraged him in it. I cant remember the words as I red, but the korus ov each verse wuz,—

"Oh! I languish fer thee—Oh!! I languish for thee,
Wherever that I be
Oh, oh! oh! I am languishin for thee—I am languishin for thee."

As I sed I never sot much store by Augustus Peedick, but truely everybody haz their strong pints, there wuz quavers put in there into them "ohs!" that never can be put in again by anybody—even Josiah lay motionless listenin to em in a kind ov awe. Jest then we herd Thomas Jefferson speakin out ov the winder overhed—

"My musikel young friend havn't u languished enuff for one nite becaus if u have, father and mother and I bein kept awak by other serenaders the forepart ov the nite, will love to excuse you—will thank u for your labers in our behaff—and love to bid u good evenin; Tirzah bein fast asleep in the other end ov the house. But dont let me hurry u Augustus—if u haint languished enough—u keep rite on a languishen—I hope I haint hard harted enuff to deny a young man and a naber, the privilege ov languishin."

I hurd a sound of footsteps on the grass under the winder, follered seeminly instantaneously by the rattlin ov the bord fence at the extremity ov the garden, judgin from the sound he must have got over the ground at a rate seldom equiled and never outdun. A button wuz found under the winder in the mornin—bust off we suppose by the impashioned beets of a 2 ardent heart—and a 2 vehement paro ov lungs exercised 2 much by the boidness and variety ov the quavers durin the last tune—that button and a fu locks ov malta fur is all we hav left to remind us ov our sufferins.

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MY OPPOSITE NEIGHBOR.
BY CARRIE D. BEEBE.
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MY OPPOSITE NEIGHBOR.

BY CARRIE D. BEEBE.

THE spring was just coming in, when the house opposite, which had been vacant all winter, found a tenant. The house was not exactly opposite, however, for it stood on a side street, and fronted, therefore, at right angles to my boarding-house. But the "second story back," which I occupied, overlooked its garden, and that is the main point in my story. I say "garden" advisedly, for, unlike most city houses, the house opposite had a deep yard behind it, part of which was shut off by a trellis-work, and was full of flower-beds; and my first knowledge that the house was occupied at last, was the sight of a young lady, a very vision of beauty, who appeared, one morning, in a charming, yet simple costume, rake in hand, to attend to these very beds.

I had always been passionately fond of flowers. I watched her, accordingly, with deep interest as, day by day, she directed a neighboring florist where to set out new plants. Afterward, she herself attended to the garden, watering the flowers, night and morning, hoeing the earth when necessary, and carefully snipping off the dead wood.

She would have been beautiful in any dress, but in this pretty garden-costume she looked divine. Graceful and tall, womanly in all her movements, I had never seen her equal. At the end of a week, I thought of nothing but my opposite neighbor. At the end of a fortnight I was hopelessly in love.

Sometimes, the notes of a piano were heard from within the opposite house; and then a voice rang out, so elastic, so sympathetic, so thoroughly cultivated, that I was ravished. Now the songs were gay; now they were sad; but always the voice was superb, the execution perfect. Several times an elderly gentleman came out into the garden: her father, no doubt.

I had often passed the house, but no name was on the door; so I did not, as yet, even know who my opposite neighbor was. I did not like to make inquiries. But, at last, Mrs. Day, my landlady, said, one day, at the table, incidentally, that the name of the people who had taken the opposite house was Vaiden, and that the young lady was the wife of the elderly gentleman.

You could have knocked me down with a feather when I heard this intelligence. But I rallied, after awhile, and asked, boldly, if Mrs. Day was certain. "There is such a disparity in their ages," I said, "it seems impossible." But she answered very positively, as landladies do, "that she had it from the best authority."

My dream was broken. Once or twice afterward, I saw my opposite neighbor at her gardening; but I always left my window when she came out; and in a fortnight went out West, more to cure myself of this hopeless fancy, than because I had anything to do in Chicago. When I came back, in the fall, the opposite house was closed, and my neighbor gone.

That very afternoon, walking down Broadway, I met an old college chum, Tom Birdsell. "Why, bless me!" he cried, "we haven't met for years. I'm just going to Delmonico's to dine. Join me, and we'll talk of old times, unless you're married, and must go home to dinner. Not married, eh?" he added, gayly. "Lucky fellow! I'm not exactly married, but I'm engaged, and I want to make the most of my liberty. So come along."

"Alice is a charming girl," he said, getting confidential as the dinner progressed. "I'm going there this evening, and, by-the-by' why won't you come, too, and give me your opinion of her? Lots of money, I can tell you. It's rather a romantic story: my engagement to her, I mean. Her father was an old chum of my father, just as you and I are, but they hadn't met for years. In fact, Alice's papa had lived at the West, and only came here last

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spring, when he rented a house for six months, till he could look around and buy one for himself. The two old fellows ran against each other accidentally in the street, were frightfully glad, insisted on Alice and I meeting, and finally, planned a match between us. My charmer was a little distant, at first; but she's coming round now; and though the wedding-day isn't fixed, the marriage is to come off, the old folk say, some time next spring."

"And do you love her?"

"Oh! enough for all practical purposes. She's lady-like, and cultivated, and pretty, and all that, and has lots of tin. It would be a pity to disappoint the old people, eh?"

"But you haven't told me her name?"

"Alice Vaiden. But, bless me, old fellow! what's the matter?"

"Nothing, or only a sudden cramp."

"I forgot to show you her picture," he said. "Here it is, a very good one, too, though I must say it flatters her slightly: all porcelain pictures do."

I knew before I took the miniature in my hand that it was my opposite neighbor's. And I had thought her married—oh, how blind! I turned aside, as if to throw the light more directly upon the picture; no one must see me while I looked upon her. How I had loved her I never knew till now.

It was she, looking upon me with calm, soft eyes—eyes that might have been my heaven!

"Well, it's seven o'clock, and I am to be there at eight. It is pretty far up, and we had better be going. No excuses. Come along," he said, as I drew back.

I allowed myself to be led away.

We reached the place, an elegant mansion, and were ushered into the drawing-room.

"I'm very glad to meet you, my dear, young friend," said Mr. Vaiden, on my being introduced to him. "I like your face, sir; and, by-the-way, it looks familiar. Still, I never heard your name before, I think."

Alice soon made her appearance. Stately and star-like she glided in, greeting her betrothed with a careless grace that seemed more like friendship than love.

I was introduced. As she gave me her hand a crimson flush shot over her face.

"I thought you were alone," she said, turning to Tom; "but your friend is very welcome."

Tom was evidently very proud of her. He was himself handsome, but superficial and selfish. I felt that, though she might admire him for a time, such a woman as Alice Vaiden could never be happy as his wife.

"Hal, you are so fond of music, you must hear Miss Alice sing," Tom said, directly.

He led her to the piano, and motioning me to a seat near her, returned to resume his conversation with Mr. Vaiden.

"Sing whatever you like best, please," I said, as she turned to ask me as to my favorite. "My sister used to sing to me before she was married; but of late I know but little of home, or home songs."

Softly she swept her white fingers over the keys, and then broke into a song full of feeling.

"I have heard you sing it before, Miss Vaiden," I said, quite forgetting myself, when she stopped.

"Ah!" she said; and again her face flushed crimson.

"This is not the first time," I went on, "I have seen you, though you do not remember me. The house you occupied, last spring, was opposite my boarding-place. I remember your face well, and your songs cheered many a lonely evening for me."

"I have seen you at your window," she replied, half shyly, in a soft, low voice, that made the blood quicken in my pulses, though why, I could hardly tell.

"Sing something more, please," I said, directly.

She chose a simple ballad, a sad one, and her voice seemed like the wail of a broken heart. When she had finished, she suddenly rose, and said,

"Are you fond of flowers? We have some very fine ones in bloom now. Tom," she added, "won't you come into the conservatory?"

Tom rose, giving her his arm as he did so. Mr. Vaiden and I followed.

"Alice, dear," said Tom, with an uncalled for show of affection, "give me a flower. A rose, say: I like roses best."

Alice broke some rose-sprays hastily, and presented them to him. "You will not forget my friend?" he said, patronizingly.

She paused by a camelia, which was crowned with rich, white blossoms, and plucking one just opened, she timidly placed it in my hand.

I understood her. She saw my love for her, and pitied me. I could not look up when I thanked her. Oh! could she but know what I knew—that the love I would give all I possessed to win was held so cheap by Tom.

"I am almost afraid I have offended papa Vaiden," said Tom, after we left. "The old idiot has gone to dabbling in stocks, and it's plain to be seen that he isn't inside the ring. It won't take very long for him to lose all he

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has. But I'll say no more on the subject. Are you going there on Tuesday night?"

"They asked me, but I have not yet decided."

"Go, by all means," he answered, carelessly. "They seem to like you; and old Vaiden doesn't take to every one."

Tuesday evening found me at Mr. Vaiden's. I had determined not to go; but I could not stay away. It was not a party, only an informal gathering, with music, dancing, and cheerful talk.

It was exquisite pleasure to be near Alice, although I knew that she was lost to me, and that I must crush out the love I felt for her.

"Come and see us often," said Mr. Vaiden, as I was leaving; "come at any and all times."

But I hesitated. I had noticed that Alice had shunned me all the evening, nor did she now join in this invitation. I stammered something, and left, resolving never to enter the house again. Tom was my friend; at least, I owed my introduction to him; and I would not be a traitor to him, even if I could. Never to see Alice again was the honorable course.

Three days after I met Tom on the street.

"Well, old Vaiden has done it at last!" he said, stopping me. "Lost every cent, just as I knew he would! That sudden tumble in stocks yesterday did it."

"And Alice?" I cried, breathlessly.

"Oh! Alice has just written me a note, asking to be released from the engagement, on account of her father's failure. Which I did, of course," he continued, with a laugh.

"The heartless scoundrel!" I muttered between my teeth, as I turned on my heel and abruptly left him.

An hour afterward, I was at Mr. Vaiden's. The old gentleman clasped my hand eagerly.

"My dear boy, do you know——" he began.

"I know all," I cried, interrupting him; "and I came to see if I could help you."

"No, I have something left; and even if I had not, I am not so old but I could work for Alice."

"And Alice, Miss Vaiden, how does she bear it?" I stammered.

"Like a heroine. But she has had more than this to bear——"

"I know it. The villain! May I—I wonder—would it be asking too much," I blurted out, desperately, "if I might see her?"

"Of course, my dear boy," he said, but with some surprise. "She is in the conservatory."

I flew to her side. She was sitting, listlessly dipping the fingers of one hand in the water of the fountain, while she leaned her head pensively on the other. At the sound of footsteps she looked up, and rose in confusion, crimsoning all over face and neck.

"Alice, darling!" I cried, excitedly. "You are free now, and I can speak. I do not dare to hope. But I love you! Oh! give me but a chance to show that I, at least, am honest and true! Ever since I used to see you gardening, ever since I heard you sing, last spring, I have loved you——"

She had sunk, breathless, into her seat again. Her bosom was heaving convulsively. Her face, one moment was pale, and then was dyed with blushes. All at once a great hope leaped up in my heart, and I stopped in my passionate, almost incoherent address.

"Can it be?" I said, seizing her hand, and speaking in a whisper. "Oh, Alice! do not play with me. Is it possible you may learn to love me?"

She returned the pressure of my hand, ever so faintly, and murmured, as her head fell on my arm,

"I'm afraid I have learned it already."

And then I heard, in broken sentences, in answer to my eager questions, that she had long loved me; but that when she found out the truth, she was engaged to another, and honor kept her silent, as it had kept me.

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THE MALTESE FAN.
BY FRANK LEE BENEDICT.
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THE MALTESE FAN.

BY FRANK LEE BENEDICT.

NOT a Maltese dog, nor a Maltese scarf, but a Maltese fan! I call it a Maltese fan, not because I know of any peculiar kind of fan which owns that name; but because Charley Livingston bought the article in Malta, that best abused of cities, one day when we were waiting for a steamer which saw fit to be behind her time. An idle, pleasant, sunny day, which left the whole party with a different impression of Malta from the usual one; for most people feel bound to talk against it, since Lord Byron cursed it so heartily in rather lame verse.

Charley Livingston bought the fan, and gave it to Cora Van Brock, the greatest coquette within half a dozen of the adjacent kingdoms, and bright enough to perform thoroughly the mission of a beauty and flirt—that of tormenting to the verge of frenzy any unfortunate male who might fall within the orbit of her fascinations.

That Charley was hard hit, we all knew, and I think Cora herself was in deadly earnest, at least for that day; for she put by her worldliness and her chill common sense, and lived her idyl to its full, regardless of after pain for herself or him.

We found the fan in an old curiosity shop, kept by the quaintest, most withered-looking Jew, with a beard like Mohammed, who spoke a polyglot of languages, and was so deprecatory and meek, that it was quite a pleasure to be cheated by him, as each was in turn. He produced the fan from a sort of wooden casket, that might have been carved centuries ago by some fanciful monk, to hold his illuminated missal; for on one side was depicted Jacob and his family in their chariots, probably on the road to Egypt; on the other side, the Blessed Virgin, with the angel holding before her the bunch of lilies, whereby, according to the ancient legend, she was warned of her approaching death. The ends had figures of saints in relief, and the top was decorated with a figure of the wounded traveler, watched over by the Good Samaritan. The carving really was wonderful, and Livingston pounced upon the box at once. It contained all sorts of odd curiosities and ornaments; among them the fan, which Charley bestowed on Miss Van Brock It was a marvelous bit of workmanship, of ebony, carved so finely that it looked like lace, the sticks quaintly inlaid with coral and mother-of-pearl, ending in a twisted snake of coral, and gems that served as a bracelet.

He gave it to her, and I, bending over the box, which they had called me to examine, heard him whisper,

"No matter what comes after—if it were possible that we should be separated for years—any time that you will carry the fan, I shall know you remember this day, and wish me to remember it."

She was all woman at that moment. Seldom since that day, I think, has any mortal seen on Cora Van Brock's face the expression which softened and elevated it then.

"I shall never forget," she answered; "never!"

It struck me that it was time for me to be discreet and move away; and I was doing it with my usual amiability, when it was rendered unnecessary by the approach of Cora's old aunt, the Dragon, as she was familiarly called among her niece's friends, though she was happily unconscious of it, and wrote herself, with great dignity, Mrs. Schuyler De Lancy Vander Schoven, and was as woodenly obstinate an old woman as ever traced her lineage back to Amsterdam.

She had fortunately been confined to her room all the morning with a headache; she said a nervous one; but as I had seen her feed like an ogress at supper the night before, I grinned incredulity, and thereby caused her to hate me more heartily than ever, which was not necessary. She had come out of the house for a walk, with her maid and her pug dog, that was afflicted with a chronic snarl, and a stumpy tail like a peg to lift him by, and had scented us out in the old curiosity shop, and as soon as she found what was going on insisted upon returning home.

"I feel very unwell, Cora; very unwell," said she, with that reproachful severity elderly women so often exhibit when speaking of their ailments, as if they had been caused by the person to whom the complaint chances to be made.

"I wonder at your coming out then, aunt," returned Miss Van Brock, with a cruel lack of

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sympathy, for she was in a mood to be sentimental and romantic, and did not wish to be brought back to reality and common sense by any old, crooked fairy of a godmother.

"I thought the air might do me good," snapped the dragon; "and I was tired of staying alone—I have been alone all day."

"Most people like it when they are suffering from dyspeptic headache," said Charley, sweetly.

"Never had anything of the sort in my life," she snapped back; "never!" The Schuylers are famous for sound stomachs; and the De Lancys might be made of oak."

"I don't see exactly how you could inherit the peculiarity from them," observed Cora, wickedly; for it was the old cat's first husband who had been a De Lancy—she had killed off two unfortunates; her last husband had died in a fit after three months of the martyrdom, and I always thought he held his breath, choosing strangulation to a longer endurance of his mate's companionship.

"I must say," returned the dragon, plaintively, "I think the ills and pains of her nearest relative a very poor subject for a young girl to exercise her wit upon."

"We had better go back to the hotel," said Cora, resignedly; for she knew that when her aunt tried the plaintive "dodge," she would be utterly unendurable.

At that stage of the quarrel, I sacrificed myself: became a burnt-offering, so to speak, on the altar of friendship. I began to talk to the old woman about her family: she would hold forth on that subject by the hour. Finally, she took my arm to walk back to the inn, the patient maid and the pug dog following; and I lost her the way, and so harrowed up her soul generally, that when she did reach the house, she had to go instantly to bed, and we were free from her for the rest of the evening.

I think it was an evening to be remembered by several members of the party—we were nine in all—but to none had it so deep a meaning as to the pair whose little story I set out to tell you. What a moon that was which shed its soft, white light over the murmuring sea! How the voice of the waves, and the low whisper of the wind, added to the magic of the scene! What a dreamy, unsubstantial, enchanting time altogether! Ah! it was one of those nights that come to us occasionally, as we pass through our youth, something set apart entirely from the past and the future, complete in itself, and so beautiful, that, no matter what pain may follow in its wake, no after memories can ever dim its recollection, or make it less beautiful!

And sitting by the sea, Charley Livingston told Cora of his love; and she listened; warning him sometimes that the hour was not real, but still listening, so softened and gentle, that he could not believe she meant to be ruled by the doctrines of cold, worldly wisdom, which she occasionally remembered to revive for his benefit.

Of course, I heard the story long after, word for word. There are conversations which men never forget; years may pass, other loves and other hates may come; but not a syllable of speeches, forgotten in these special colloquies, can be forgotten.

Cora Van Brock and her aunt had been wandering about Europe for a year. The last winter they had spent in Rome, the spring in Florence; and the old dragon had "assisted" at several marriages, wherein American girls gained titles as long and romantic as any you can find in a sentimental novel. She was now beset with the idea of buying one for Cora; and Cora, though she owned a host of good qualities, had been her pupil too many years not to have acquired any amount of false ideas and theories.

She had gone through a couple of years of belle-hood in New York, and her heart had never once been touched, and she had sagely decided that it never could be seriously; and three years of rush and excitement had worn out even the freshness of feeling which made ephemeral fancies possible to her. It was during the spring, in Florence, that she met Charley Livingston for the first time. In spite of his Knickerbocker blood, he knew little of America beyond the recollections of his childhood; his widowed mother having had, for the last fifteen years, an idea that she could not live out of Italy—not on account of her soul-yearnings, or any of the poetical reasons which make young ladies sigh for that land of romance—it was simply her stomach, and her bronchial tubes, and other physical unpleasantnesses, which influenced her.

My Charles was only twenty-three. He considered that a vast age, and so did I at the time. I have seen cause since to alter my opinion somewhat; but no matter how long I have had to do it in, I wish people would remember that story-tellers are like the inhabitants of enchanted castles in fairy-tales, always young.

Charles had inherited from his father a handsome face, and a good deal of sparkling

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talent; but the fortune with which the paternal began life had diminished greatly, though it was still a fair competency for a man accustomed to Continental life.

The old dragon was so engrossed by her dreams of titled grandeur for her niece, and had such perfect faith in Cora's working hand-in-hand with her to attain that desirable end, that she paid very little attention to what went on where Livingston was concerned. If he chose, like a silly moth, to scorch his wings in the flame, that was solely his affair. I am not sure that Cora herself did not think so at first. But Charley was sufficiently superior to ordinary men to make flirting with him rather dangerous work for any woman—and so the calculating young lady found it before she was through.

She had found it so already, and meant to get away from his society; but one thing and another had prevented it; whether fate, or Master Charley's management, I am not quite certain. This Mediterranean trip the old dragon had consented to, or rather been eager for, because an old French marchioness and her nephew, heir to a long title, a tumble-down chateau, and a great many debts, were to be of the party. But destiny was cruel to the dragon. At the last moment, after we were actually on the steamer, news came that the elderly French lady was ill, and monsieur, her nephew, like a dutiful young man, remained with her. I wondered if he would have been so attentive if the little, dried-up marquise, with curls like a poodle-dog, had been poor, instead of the possessor of very respectable *rentes;* but you see, in those days, I was young, and thought it poetical to do the misanthrope.

But if the small Frenchman was not of the party, Charley Livingston was, to the dragon's surprise; and I thought it a very tidy bit of retribution, that it chanced to be Charley himself, who was the bearer of the courteous note, the young marquis wrote. He announced himself *desole, abime,* etc.; and the bow with which Charley placed the scented, coroneted billet in the dragon's claw, was as pretty a high-comedy point, as one could wish to see.

The poor dragon, however, had little leisure even for rage, for she speedily became the prey of sea-sickness—and a wretched old dragon she was. Her state-room was next to mine, and I could hear her groaning and gulping at all hours of the night.

And here we were at Malta; and Charley Livingston arrived at the culmination of his audacity, put all his devotion and love into passionate speech, and made Cora's heart quiver, and her reason feel what a silly creature she had been, to play with fire, and burn her fingers so severely.

"It cannot be, Charley—you know it cannot; it is just madness, and there is the end of it," she said.

"I don't know it, Cora; you don't believe it, either. I am sure now that you care for me!"

"I am sure that you are very impertinent."

"Don't play with me, Cora; it is too late for that! This pleasant trip is over, we have to separate now, for I am obliged to go back to America, for a time."

"I am sure the voyage will do you a world of good. What a pity you are never sea-sick!"

He felt himself growing angry, but he would not give way to the passion, lest he should lose the little advantage he had gained.

"I shall return as soon as possible," he continued.

"You ought, on your mother's account," she answered.

"And I want you to say that you will be glad to see me."

"Of course I shall—if we happen to meet."

"Happen to meet?" he repeated.

"That was what I said; please, don't repeat my words, they are not precise enough for me to wish to hear them twice."

I have no doubt she suffered in acting the part she was forcing herself to act; but that only made her more cruel and hard. She meant to end matters here. She saw already the danger there was from her own weakness, and she was determined that her heart should not be the means of making her false to her worldly theories.

"Of course, we shall meet," he added; "you know that I will come to you, at once."

"It is not a matter of course at all; you will hurry on to Italy to see your mother; and I certainly have no intention of burying myself, for another winter, in any of those modern Pompeiis."

"Are you trying to make me angry, Cora?"

"What an idea! I am simply making a statement of facts—clearly as a prime minister could do."

Of course, he grew vexed, then they quarreled; and she was sufficiently softened, for the moment, to give him renewed hope; then her work was all to do over again. There can be nothing original, or new, in a quarrel between two lovers, from whatever cause arising; so I may spare you further repetition of what they said.

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But they parted then, Charles Livingston went away to America, and Cora followed the old dragon up to Paris, and spent the winter there; and when spring came, they went over to London. Livingston kept his word. He had sworn, that night, not to intrude upon her, and, unless some mutual acquaintance chanced to utter his name, Cora Van Brock never heard it spoken.

Before the summer was over, the dragon had won for her niece the position she coveted. Cora became the wife of Sir Henry Dacre, Bart. "Only a baronet," scornfully said the relatives of young Yankees, who had wedded French marquises and German dukes. "Worth all their trumpery titles put together," pronounced the dragon, and was triumphant. She paid down the dowry, that was to be Cora's, according to her uncle's will, if she married to please her aunt—seventy thousand pounds. I reckon this amount in English money, because that was what Sir Henry Dacre, Bart., did.

The dragon only lived three months after that happy wedding morning: her earthly work was done; and she departed to her own place, as each of us shall in turn, wherever it may be. The chief consolation she found in her illness, during which she suffered great pain, was to look at Cora's visiting-cards, with Lady Dacre engraved thereupon, and to sort the ornaments of her dressing-case, decorated with the baronet's crest. I believe Cora was very good to her, and very attentive; and though her troubles had already begun, she kept them to herself; and the old woman died in peace. Her mind wandered during her last hours; she seemed to think herself one of the dead-and-gone Lady Dacres, and was particular about having the family coat-of-arms emblazoned on her coffin, and her winding-sheet, too.

"There's no knowing," said the old woman, frowning and moaning, "how far these modern enormities may extend, and I want to be prepared."

Then she revived for a little, and complained of being slowly driven out into the cold and dark. Though she recognized the people about her, she could not free herself from that delusion, and begged them piteously not to let her be forced away.

"Hold me fast!" she said, over and over, to Cora; "hold me fast! I can't go there! I won't go there!"

"You are safe here, on the bed," Cora would answer. "See, I am holding your hand."

"Yes, yes; but there's something behind the curtains, pushing me away. I can't see them, but they're there! There's a dark road—oh! how narrow it is, and so cold—so cold! I'm freezing, Cora, I'm freezing!"

Her voice grew fainter, her struggles ceased; but still she murmured brokenly about the dark and the narrow way, "so cold—oh, so cold!" The voice was silent at last! The wrinkled form lay stretched upon the bed, never to move again; and the time was gone by when human lips had any right even to speak of the follies and mistakes of her past life. As for the future, that was in God's hands; and though her sins may appear abhorrent to your nature and mine, it does not follow that they were any worse than ours. Bury her. Let her rest!

Sir Henry Dacre was away from home when Mrs. Vander Schoven died. He was in Paris, where, indeed, the baronet saw fit to make his residence altogether; and Cora learned that England was not likely to be a pleasant resting-place for him, at any time to come. She learned a good many other things in regard to him; she saw for herself that he was utterly brutal and degraded; and after the first few weeks of marriage, he did not even make the pretence of concealing his vices from her. Certain dubious transactions on the turf had stamped his reputation indelibly, as far as England was concerned; and when he and Cora chanced, one day, to meet a noble kinsman of his, the noble kinsman passed the baronet without so much as a sign of salutation.

Four years passed. I was in Berlin, and found Lady Dacre living there. She had been a widow nearly two years. I learned from those familiar with the history of her married life, that it would be difficult to imagine a worse purgatory than that she had endured, while it lasted. There was no outrage which she escaped, scarcely any conceivable shame that was spared her. But, at last, the baronet died. Lady Dacre had her title, and a very small income from some American property, which she inherited too short a time before her husband's death for him to waste it. She could manage to live in tolerable comfort there, on her narrow means, and was free now to enjoy the life she had chosen for herself, if any faculty of enjoyment was left.

She was twenty-four years old at this time, and handsome still, though she looked older than her age, and all the youth and animation had gone out of her face. A relative of her husband's was ambassador there, and was very kind to her; so that she had society, if she

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wished it; but with neither fortune, nor spirits to make it particularly agreeable, to a woman of her disposition at least.

I saw her often, and we became quite confidential; and it was I who told her the news that came across seas, concerning Charley Livingston. Charley had never been back to Europe. His mother had died suddenly, and he had sensibly gone into business, and in some of the mysterious ways in which New Yorkers do such things, had grown rich. I heard this, for he used to write to me at times. I knew he had not forgotten his old love, or its pain, either. But, for a year past, I had been in the East, and had gained no tidings of him. Soon after I got to Berlin, I saw, in a newspaper, that he accepted a diplomatic appointment to the Prussian court, and was coming over at once.

I told Lady Dacre. She received the news very quietly, having reached that stage of elegant breeding, which, I am informed, is the highest mortal can attain, where nothing startles one into pleasure or surprise. But under all her fine manners, Lady Dacre was moved, and I saw it. From that day she used to talk to me about the past. She spoke frankly of her mistakes and her weakness; her whole face changed; life came back to her face, and her eyes grew softened; and I knew that she was living over the old dream, and nourishing a new hope for the future, which had looked so cold and dead.

I waited and wondered. It did look like Fate's work, bringing those two together, after a separation that had been worse than the partings death makes. How would Charley act? I could form no theory whatever. Whether he loved her sufficiently to forgive the wrong she had done him and overlook it; whether he would be hard and unforgiving, I could not decide. But I was confident that, in her own mind, Lady Dacre had no doubt. She believed that, whatever his anger or resentment had been, her old power over him would easily be restored, when he was once more brought within the spell of her influence. I thought it quite possible, but could come to no decision.

Some weeks after, I was a a reception given by an American, and Lady Dacre was there. As I entered, and was making my best bow to my hostess, the latter whispered,

"Charles Livingston arrived this afternoon. My husband made him promise to come tonight. So unfortunate that Lady Dacre is here!"

She evidently had more to say, but I was in too great a hurry to wait for it. I rushed off to Lady Dacre and told her the news, thinking it a little malicious of our hostess not to have warned her, as she knew the whole story as well as I did. But when I reached her side, I knew, without speaking a word, that Lady Dacre had learned who was expected.

She was looking very handsome, that night, plainly dressed in white, and in her hand she carried the fan Charley Livingston had given her, years before, in Malta.

She said, almost immediately,

"Did you know he was in Berlin—is coming here?"

"Mrs. Lorsing has just told me," I answered.

"She has said nothing to me. My maid saw him in the street, as he was talking to Lorsing, and heard him promise to come."

I remembered the words which had passed between the pair, when that fan was given and accepted; but Lady Dacre did not know that I had heard them, so she fluttered it slowly in my face, with beautiful unconsciousness. She kept me by her, trying to talk, so to appear as usual.

I did my little best, but it was hard work for both; and I could see her eyes turning constantly toward the outer-saloon, where Mrs. Lorsing was receiving her guests.

For a time there was a crowd in the doorway, and we could not see who entered: it divided, and I beheld Charley Livingston making his way through it. He was older, and altered, as was natural; but handsomer than ever; the same Charley still, that was evident. I quite forgot my good-breeding, and started forward with an audible exclamation. He saw me, and rushed up. "Another old friend here," I said. He turned, and saw Lady Dacre. She was leaning back in her chair, perfectly quiet, but very pale: in her beautiful hand slowly fluttered the Maltese fan. I would have let Charley go up alone, but he kept my hand fast in his arm, and we walked toward her. Another instant and he was bowing over the slender fingers she extended to him, with no expression in his face but that of extreme pleasure and friendliness.

"This is like old times," he said, "meeting you two here; and to think I didn't know either of you were in this part of the world."

"Didn't know it?" I repeated. I had thought, from the first, that he had accepted the position because he knew Lady Dacre lived there; I know she had thought so, too.

"No," he answered; "but it is a great, great

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pleasure to me, Lady Dacre. I am sure you know that."

In spite of her training and her fine manners, the color came into Lady Dacre's cheeks, and her eyes sunk almost timidly under his. I began to think that I had better get out of the way, when Charley added,

"I must bring my wife and present her to you; she feels as if she knew you both already."

"Your wife?" This from me, in a shrill tenor, several octaves too high for true elegance.

Lady Dacre sat silent; but the hand, that held the fluttering fan, dropped slowly into her lap.

"Yes," continued unconscious Charley, "I was married just before I sailed. Wait till I bring my wife—I'll tell you all about it then."

He started off. I stood silent. Lady Dacre did not speak either. The hand that held the Maltese fan shook slightly. I heard the inlaid sticks creak ominously under the pressure of her fingers. I wanted to say something, to get away, but I could do nothing.

Back Charley came. Leaning on his arm was a pretty, bright, sensible-looking girl, exquisitely dressed, and Charley presented her to Lady Dacre as his wife. I was named in turn; and thus we four stood, face to face, in one of those odd chances of life that make such pretty points in novels, and such telling tableaux on the stage, but are so very uncomfortable to live through.

While I was conscious of looking more like a christianized chimpanzee than anything else, I saw Lady Dacre draw the pretty bride down to the sofa, heard her say charming things in a charming way, and with an air of interest, faithful to her elegant manners and her woman's tact to the last.

Charley began to talk to me. In the midst of his happy rattle—and that he was happy it needed only one look in his face to be certain—I heard his wife say,

"Oh, Lady Dacre! you have broken your pretty fan!"

Charley turned. He had not noticed or remembered the fan, when he was first talking to her; he did not see it now, for Lady Dacre, with one quick movement, broke the slender chain which bound it to her wrist, and hid the broken toy in the folds of her dress.

"It is no matter," she said; "an old thing my maid gave me without my noticing."

She rose from her seat, held the bride's hands, and added,

"Now I must run away. I am engaged at my cousin's, Lord Ponsonby. I would look in here for a moment, because I was told that I should meet my old friend, Mr. Livingston. I hope I have met a new one, too, in his wife."

A few pretty words from the happy young bride, a cordial confirmation from Charley, then Lady Dacre took my arm, and I led her away down the crowded saloons.

Certainly, no great actress ever performed her most telling part more effectively than she. But, even in my thoughts, I respected her pride too much to presume to pity her. Whatever her pain was, she could bear it, I knew, if she believed her secret safe and unsuspected.

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THE SECRET AT BARTRAM'S HOLME.: CHAPTER IX.
BY JANE G. AUSTIN.
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THE SECRET AT BARTRAM'S HOLME.

BY JANE G. AUSTIN.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 137.

CHAPTER IX.

"ROSAMOND!" And whispering the name, Walton Percival laid his hand upon his cousin's arm and bent toward her, trying to determine, in the dim light, whether her face was hidden from him in sport, or fright, or whether this were, indeed, herself. The human touch, the human voice, aroused the girl from the panic-fit into which she had fallen, and suddenly clinging to her cousin's arm, she whispered,

"Oh, Walton! I have seen——"

"What? In God's name!" he cried, infected by her terror, "not the lady who looks like you?"

"No—and I never saw any one that looked like him—but I am sure he was not like one of us."

"The man who looked out of the third-story window this morning," said Walton, thoughtfully, to himself, partially recovering his self-control.

"Let us go and sit down in the window," said Rosamond, falteringly, "I feel a little faint."

"Lean upon my arm! Poor child! it is too much for you, and I ought not to have asked it; but I thought it must be you for whom the appearance, so like you, was intended, and I fancied you very strong and brave in such matters."

"So I am, or so I will be," said Rosamond, recovering herself with an effort; and without aid she walked along the gallery to the stairs, and descended to the oriel-window, followed by Walton, who seated himself at a little distance.

At the same moment the low sound of a key turning in the lock was heard, and the door of the housekeeper's room swung softly open, and Mrs. Nancy appeared upon the threshold, stooping a little forward, and eagerly scanning the corridor and galleries, while the dim light from within the room threw forward her wierd figure, and extraordinary head, with an effect scarcely less startling than that of the supernatural appearances which had preceded it.

"She has heard our footsteps, or voices, and is looking for them," softly whispered Walton in Rosamond's ear: but, cautious as was the whisper, it seemed to reach the ears of the old woman, who immediately advanced down the gallery toward the stair-case.

"She will find us here—and what will she think?" said Rosamond to herself. But suddenly between her eyes and the figure of the old woman, creeping stealthily down the gallery, appeared two other figures, standing at the head of the stairs for a moment, and then moving slowly toward the housekeeper, who, seeing them, stopped short, and clenching both her fists, shook them in angry defiance toward the figures, who steadily advanced until, almost reaching her, the woman paused, and the man, holding up his right hand with a gesture of menace and command, strode one step nearer, as if about to touch the old woman, who, withstanding him no longer, retreated step by step backward, closely followed by her strange pursuer, until gaining her own room, she rushed into it, and closed and locked the door. Then the male figure rejoining his companion, the two retraced their steps, glided along the gallery, and down the stairs, until reaching the level of the recessed window, where the cousins sat, they paused, and fixed their mournful and wistful eyes upon them.

Rosamond, creeping closer to her cousin's side, clung to his arm, and from that shelter examined, with shrinking curiosity, the appearance of the woman whom Walton had thought to resemble her so closely; and as she did so, found herself oppressed with the same sort of incredulous horror one might feel in suddenly encountering himself face to face—a horror ascribed by the Germans to their *doppel-gangers*, or persons afflicted with a second visible self, who accompanies or meets them at every turn, until the sufferer sinks at last beneath the unnatural life forced upon him.

Thus, in a measure, felt Rosamond Thorne, in scrutinizing a figure, a face so precisely her own, that it seemed to her as if the wasting and consuming sorrow, the terrible longing and questioning of that face must also be hers; and as she looked her heart sunk within her, with a sense of desolation such as never before had fallen upon her happy life. From this, her own most woeful image, Rosamond looked

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at the male figure, whose stern, dark eyes were bent upon her own with an expression of mingled entreaty and command, so intense as to acquire an actually fearful power. Beneath that gaze Rosamond's eyes fell, and shrinking nearer to her cousin, she whispered,

"What is it they want? They are trying to ask something of us."

Walton did not reply; but, as if in answer to her question, the spectral Rosamond extended her clasped hands, with an imploring gesture; and then both figures turned and glided up the stairs, the man waving his hand, as if summoning them to follow.

"Let us go!" whispered Walton; and firmly clasping his hand, Rosamond suffered him to lead her up the stairs, and along the gallery, down which the spectres were gliding with the peculiar movement they always exhibited. At the entrance of the side corridor the figures paused, as if to make sure that they were followed, and then turned down it. Walton Percival and Rosamond quickened their footsteps, and reaching the corridor a moment later, saw the two standing at the remote end of the passage, beside the baize-door.

"This is just the way she led me, last night," whispered Percival; but Rosamond could not reply, and they passed quickly down the corridor. Arrived at the door, they missed their guides, but found them upon the other side, where they stood hand-in-hand, their wistful eyes turned upon the young people for a moment, then moved slowly toward the corner of the chamber, from which descended the stairs mentioned as conducting to the kitchen and offices, and there disappeared, how neither of the spectators could determine.

"They are gone," whispered Rose, with a gasp of relief, as the faint luminous aureola enveloping the two figures faded slowly away.

"Yes—but where, or how? I cannot understand this at all!" he exclaimed. "I do not believe in supernatural appearances, yet what else are they? What have we seen, Rose?"

"Spirits of the departed," said Rosamond, in a whisper of awe; "and they have work for me to do—for me especially. They have come to call me to do it. But, oh, Walton! how can I connect myself with phantoms? How can I understand, or how can I endure to see and meet them?" And Rosamond, clinging closer to her cousin's arm, suffered him to lead her back into the corridor, almost without consciousness of what she was about. At the door of her chamber Walton paused, and holding her hand in his, said kindly,

"I cannot answer these questions now, dear; but they shall be answered sooner or later. I have a theory, but I cannot keep you here longer. Go and get some rest, and to-morrow we will speak of it, again."

"Good-night, then, Walton."

"Good-night, dear child."

And with a cordial pressure of the hand, they parted, she creeping as softly as possible into her own room and quietly undressing herself; while Delia, watching her from beneath her almost closed eyelids, said to herself, over and over, "She has been to meet Walton! She has been to meet Walton!"

But when Rosamond, softly lying down beside her, said, "Delia!" the dark-fringed eyelids closed tightly, and the watcher became, to all appearance, a profound sleeper, so that Rosamond, after a moment's scrutiny, laid her innocent head upon its pillow, with a sigh of relief, and thanked heaven that she was once more in safety. Five minutes more, and she was sound asleep; and then it was Delia's turn to quietly rise, and with white, naked feet, and flowing, ghost-like draperies, to pace the chamber up and down through the faint starlight, and the heavy shadow, until far in the east broke the first gray of dawn.

Walton, meanwhile, having seen Rosamond in safety, went to his own room, and procured a light, and a stout hunting-knife, with a short, double-edged blade. He was about to put his theory to the test. Returning to the unfinished chamber, he softly closed the door, and holding the lamp above his head, deliberately surveyed the whole place, but especially the corner where the two apparently spectral figures had disappeared.

"That is rather an odd arrangement," remarked he, aloud, as he noted the construction of the stair-case occupying this corner: and, to tell the truth, it *was* a very odd arrangement. The stairs descended from about the middle of the side of the chamber, and ran toward the body of the house, the unfinished room being the first in a wing added to this side of the main building. Standing at the top of the stair-case, Walton perceived that the ceiling was carried down in a line parallel to that of the stairs, arguing another stair-case above, ascending to the third story; and yet, in the room where he stood, a smooth wall, built of lath and plaster, extended along the side of the stair-case quite back of the partition-wall. This wall was hung, too, with an old-fashioned paper, and both had evidently been there for years, precisely as they now stood.

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"The upper stair-case should start from this point, and here is nothing but a dead wall," said Percival, impatiently, as he tapped the wall with the handle of his knife. To his horror, an answering tap replied to him from the other side of the wall.

"I will see what it is, at any rate," muttered the young man; and with his knife, he carefully detached a small piece of the plaster, and cut away a section of the lath which appeared beneath. A hole, large enough to admit a hand holding a lamp, was soon carved out, and the workman was carefully paring away some rough projections, preparatory to thrusting the lamp through it, when his knife was suddenly twisted from his hand, and fell with a loud clash to the floor within. Instinctively Percival stooped and put his eyes to the aperture, although he could have seen nothing in the darkness, even could he have got his head through; but no sooner had his face arrived opposite the breach, than a hand, armed with crooked, skeleton-like fingers, was thrust through, and twining itself in his beard, dragged him close to the opening, and there held him for a moment. Furious with anger, Percival tore himself away.

"Infamous fiend! Why do you haunt me in this manner!" he cried. But only the shrill, elfish laughter, already described, replied to him.

"I will know what this means, before I sleep, if I rouse the whole house for it," persisted the young man; and passing again through the baize-door to the side corridor, he knocked peremptorily at the door of old Nancy's chamber. Somewhat to his surprise it was immediately opened by the old woman, who appeared dressed, as usual, and holding a candle in her hand, whose upward light threw grotesque shadows over her impressive face and wild, gray hair.

"What do you want, young man?" asked she, as soon as the door was open, and without waiting for Percival to speak.

"Who snatched my knife? Who mocked me with their insolent laughter? What is the mystery of that hidden stair-case? What are these juggles of spectres, which glide about the passages by day and night? If you know, answer me, here and now, or it shall be the worse for you!" passionately exclaimed Percival.

The housekeeper fixed her stern, strange eyes upon his unwaveringly.

"Young man," said she, "you have either been dreaming, or drinking too much. There are no spectres in this house. As to your knife, I suppose that was what I heard drop through the partition-wall, into the closet of my chamber. I keep my petticoats and cast-off dresses in that closet, and to-morrow, if you are still anxious to inspect them, I will show them to you. Meantime, I will advise you to go to bed and cool your brain."

CHAPTER X.

Mistress Nancy's advice, although not very palatable, was so exceedingly sensible, that Mr. Percival found himself constrained to accept it; and when the door was closed and locked in his face, he turned quietly away and sought his own. In entering it, he carelessly stumbled over a chair; and Capt. Page, starting up and reaching for the revolver lying upon the stand at his bed-head, shouted,

"Who's there?"

"Only I—no harm done," replied Percival, curtly; but the old sailor was too much accustomed to sudden alarms to be long in arousing himself, and rising upon his elbow, he looked first at his watch, and then at his room-mate.

"Half-past one, and you not undressed? What's up? Anything wrong?"

"Nothing, nothing at all," replied Percival, in so reserved a manner that the captain said no more, and was presently asleep again; but the incident left an impression of annoyance upon Percival's mind, destined to be justified by later events.

The next morning, Mrs. Nancy returned the hunting-knife to its owner, as he passed the door of her chamber, with the remark,

"Here is your knife, Mr. Percival, and when you wish to look into my closets again, I shall be happy to show you through the door."

"Thank you, Miss Nancy; and I dare say I may trouble you to do so soon. There are various matters about this house, which I intend to look into before I leave it."

"Yes, sir, yes! Youth is apt to be an inquiring season," replied the old woman, turning again into her own room; and Percival found himself unable to decide whether she was jeering him, or speaking with the quaint freedom of old age.

Breakfast passed merrily, in spite of the fact that every one of the party, except alone aunt Matilda, had some secret anxiety, or suspicion, to make them thoughtful; for even Capt. Page, remembering that he had heard the sound of low voices in the hall a few moments before Percival's entrance to the chamber, could not but wonder which of the young ladies had

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kept their host company in his vigil, and what the occurrence betokened.

The day passed without any remarkable event, and Ichabod performed his share of the household duties undaunted by the sights and sounds which had proved so terrible to the weaker nerves of Mademoiselles Susan and Katy. After tea, the whole party strolled among the green lanes bordering the estate; and Walton, conscious that the two young ladies had each good reason to expect his peculiar attention, exerted himself to be impartially polite and agreeable to both; and succeeded as well as could be expected in so arduous an undertaking.

Capt. Page, meantime, escorted Miss Matilda, and delicately angled after her opinion of her other two guests, and her wishes as to her nephew's preferences.

"Oh! of course, I like Rosamond best; and I should be very glad if Walton should fancy her," said Miss Matilda, frankly.

"And do you think Miss Rosamond encourages his attentions?" asked the crafty captain.

"Encourage? Well, Rosamond is not a girl to do much of that; but you can see how friendly she is with him."

"Yes, very friendly," replied the captain, abstractedly, and, to himself, added, "Something more than friendly, if she stays up until two o'clock in the morning with him."

"Are you tired, young ladies? Will you have my arm, or my arms?" asked Walton, as they came within sight of home, and the girls began to droop a little.

"Thank you," murmured Delia, and accepted the arm, leaning upon it in the confidential, almost caressing manner, which some women use and find so effective.

"And you, Rosamond?" asked Percival.

"No, thank you! I always thought it very selfish for the second drowning man to insist upon clinging to the spar which the first finds no more than sufficient," said Rosamond, gayly; and swinging the little walking-stick she carried, she tripped on in advance.

"I wish I were as independent, both of protection and of love as Rose is," sighed Delia. "She is sufficient unto herself always; but I cling so to those who are kind to me, I sometimes fear I become troublesome."

"Never to me, Delia," began Walton, bending his own to meet the bewitching eyes upraised to draw them; but, before the sentence could be finished, Rosamond came flying back, her face white in the deepening twilight, and her gray eyes dark with terror.

"See, Walton! see there!" exclaimed she, and pointed to the house.

Walton and Delia looked, and saw the whole house brilliantly illuminated, as if for a *fete;* light streaming even from the shuttered windows of the third story; while through the uncovered half of one window at the front, several figures could be seen passing monotonously backward and forward.

"People in the third story again!" exclaimed Percival, while Delia clung to his arm, mute with terror, and Rosamond looked blankly in his face.

"Hillo, Percival! what is that?" exclaimed Capt. Page, from the rear. "Who's illuminating the old house?"

"That's what nobody knows," replied the young man, thoughtfully. "And, in fact, there's a great deal that nobody knows about the place."

"Never mind, Walton, don't talk about it now!" exclaimed Miss Matilda, who, ostrich-like, preferred anything to looking disagreeable matters straight in the face.

"Let us go and see what it all means," said the captain.

"Very well," replied Walton; and the party again moved forward, but more silently and more rapidly than before.

The light shone steadily, illuminating the arcades of the elm avenue, and showing each the pallid and wondering faces of his companions, until they arrived directly in front of the house, when it suddenly died out, not gradually, but in one flash, leaving everything, by contrast, in far more than its natural obscurity. The ladies paused, panic-stricken, and huddled together about the gentlemen; but Percival, with a parting word of encouragement, left them to the care of the captain, and rushing round the corner of the house to the side entrance, found Ichabod coolly smoking his pipe upon the steps.

"Come in here, quick!" ordered Percival, springing up the steps.

The man obeyed, without a word, following his master, who rushed through all the lower rooms of the house, and back to the door, before he asked,

"Where's the old woman?"

"In her chamber, sir. Just this minute I heard her shut a window," replied Ichabod.

"And nobody but you two in the house?"

"No, sir; nobody that you can put a name to."

"And you have not had any lamps lighted in any part of the house?"

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"No, sir, not yet. I was waiting for you to get home. I'll light 'em now."

"Do so." And Percival slowly returned to his friends, saying,

"I can offer no explanation as yet. Let us go in."

The short remainder of the evening was passed in talking of everything but the subject uppermost in every mind, and that was by tacit consent avoided, except when Percival said, quietly, to Rosamond, who sat by herself in a window-seat,

"I shall watch again to-night. Will you join me?"

"It hardly seems worth while, unless I can do anything toward unraveling the mystery. I am not afraid, but I do no good, and may be in your way."

"Besides, 'it is so odd,' as you said before," added Percival; and Rosamond colored rather resentfully.

"I am sure you have no right to call me prudish," she began shy; but Percival, touching her arm, nodded toward Capt. Page and Delia, who were slowly promenading the terraced-walk below the windows, and were at that moment within ear-shot.

"Never mind, little cousin," said Percival, when they had passed. "I was only laughing at you, and I do not need you at all to-night; or, if I think you can help me, I will let you know."

Delia and the captain repassed the window, he earnestly engaged in the narration of a sea-fight, she listening intently—but not to him. At this moment aunt Matilda, who had been for some moments fidgeting about the room with her chamber-candlestick in her hand, approached the window, and said, in a low voice,

"Rosamond, I have been thinking—— Do you suppose Delia would be afraid to sleep alone?"

"I dare say not, cousin Matilda. Do you want me to sleep with you?" asked Rosamond, blithely.

"Yes, dear, if you would not object, and feel pretty sure that she would not be afraid. I should be very glad to have you. I sometimes have neuralgia in the night, and cannot sleep; and it is so much pleasanter to have some one with you."

"Don't be afraid, Rose," interposed Walton, laughing, "my aunt's neuralgia will keep neither you or her awake to-night. The real trouble will be cured by your simple presence."

"Nonsense, Walton! Well, dear, I am going to speak to Ichabod, and, perhaps, you will ask your sister. Then, when I return, should you like to go up?"

"Certainly, if you wish me to," replied Rose, who of all things detested early bed, but would have gone at sunset, if thereby she could soothe, or comfort, somebody weaker than herself. So, while Miss Matilda went to consult Ichabod upon certain domestic points, Rosamond called Delia aside, and briefly inquired if she objected to sleeping alone, as, if she did not, Miss Percival would like her company.

"No, I am not afraid. What is there to be afraid of? Why is Miss Percival afraid?" asked Delia, rather contemptuously.

"She did not say that she was. She only asked me to sleep with her," said Rosamond, coldly; and the girls separated in mutual displeasure, Rosamond saying to herself,

"I do not know what has happened to Delia since we came here, to make her so unamiable and suspicious;" while through Delia's mind passed the thought, "She courts the opportunity of another midnight promenade with her lover. I will bring her out in it, and show her before them all."

A few moments later the ladies retired, and soon after Capt. Page followed their example. When he was left alone, Walton, first opening both doors of the library, that he might both see and hear what went on around him, established himself with a book and a stock of segars, determined to watch through the night.

The hours passed—eleven, twelve, one, struck, and nothing had broken the monotony of the watch.

"I will lie down on the sofa and rest a bit," remarked Percival, to himself; and in fifteen minutes more he was sound asleep.

Two o'clock, and Delia Thorne, lying awake and listening jealously for any sounds answering to her suspicions, heard voices and footsteps, now near, now retreating. Springing from her bed, she pushed back the heavy masses of hair, and listened as acutely as only a jealous woman can listen.

"What!" exclaimed she, at last. "They are overhead! All that pretence of ghosts, and I know not what, was to frighten the rest of us away! They meet each other then—they are there now. I will surprise them, and expose her arts and wiles to the scorn of the whole house. Wait, Miss Rosamond; wait until I see how I can come at you best."

A moment she stood with clenched hands pressed upon her bosom, and fierce eyes wandering about the room, while still overhead the

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soft footsteps and broken voices told of the midnight rendezvous.

"I have it now!" exclaimed Delia, and going to the window, she softly raised it, and looked out and upward.

CHAPTER XI.

"CAN I?" asked Delia, of herself, examining the projections and architectural ornaments of the balcony and bow-window over the front door, which were close to the window of the chamber appropriated to Rosamond and herself.

"Can I? Yes, I will!" muttered she, after a few moments of anxious hesitation; and hastily throwing on a few clothes, and a pair of soft slippers without heels, she stepped boldly out upon the window-ledge, from that to the balustrade surrounding the balcony of the bow-window, and then, clinging to the pilaster beside the window, and availing herself of its inequalities as footholds, aided, too, by a great woodbine, whose gnarled and twisted stem served almost the purpose of a ladder, she climbed upward until her head came upon a level with the lower edge of the window of the room above.

Here, however, all her aids failed her at once. The pilaster dwindled to a mere ornament; the woodbine grew so slender that it threatened to break beneath her weight; and it was only by grasping the sill of the window above, that she managed to draw herself so far up as to obtain a partial view of the interior.

But, as her eyes fastened upon this interior, fear, fatigue, shame, were forgotten and merged in an absorbing interest.

The room into which she looked was large, but low, and evidently formed one of a suite, for a door at either end stood open, and a light shone from within the one at the left hand. The sides of this room were lined with shelves crowded with books, and in the midst stood a large library-table, whose litter of papers, writing-utensils, books and pamphlets, showed it to be in constant use. Among them stood a shaded lamp, and beside it, in a study-chair, with his back to the window, sat a man, his head leaning upon his hand in an attitude of either deep thought, or dejection, perhaps both.

"Walton Percival! But I certainly heard voices as well as footsteps—where is she?" asked the spy, as her strained eyes wandered through the room, whose dense shadows the vivid, but limited circle of light beneath the lamp failed to dissipate.

Suddenly, and as if in answer to her demand, another figure appeared at the door of the chamber to the left; her graceful form clearly defined against the dim light at her back, and the rich abundance of her hair falling in glittering waves below her waist. A moment she stood leaning against the door-casing, her eyes fixed earnestly upon the student in the arm-chair; and then she glided forward, until she stood close beside him, and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"My lady Rosamond, and bold enough!" muttered Delia, her dark face glowing with anger and jealousy, while her flaming eyes scornfully ran over the rich and peculiar dress worn by the new-comer.

"But why is she dressed in that style?" mentally commented she. "Is it to amuse herself and her lover, or are they playing ghosts to frighten the rest of us, and prevent our finding them out?"

While asking herself these questions, the unhappy girl ceased not listening and watching with the most acute attention, always hoping to secure some proof of the intrigue she suspected, some evidence by which she might ruin the sister-friend, who had through all her life treated her with nothing but affection and indulgence. But of all the sayings of the wise men, none is truer than that "jealousy is a consuming fire," withering and blasting every noble emotion of the human heart. For although the lovers appeared to talk in a low and confidential voice, not all Delia's efforts succeeded in catching a single word of their conversation; and she could only judge of its tenor by seeing that he whom she called Walton Percival, was holding Rosamond's hands in his, and occasionally raising them to his lips; while she, with drooping head, and face buried in her golden hair, seemed much distressed or confused, and only replied to him by monosyllables or gestures.

Suddenly the attention of the spectator was attracted by a slight movement of the door at the further side of the room, the one opposite to that through which Rosamond had entered, and the figure and face of an old woman gradually became defined upon the darkness—an old woman, whose straight, spare figure, white hair, and pallid face, with its dark and solemn eyes, Delia had no difficulty in recognizing as those of the housekeeper.

"Good!" muttered she. "Now I have a witness!"

But the two figures, beside the table, suddenly rising, moved hand-in-hand toward the

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intruder, now as if they had a right to resent, than to fear her presence; and she, drawing back as they advanced, all three disappeared into the darkness of the room beyond, the light of the lamp upon the table seeming to follow and envelope them, leaving the library in darkness.

Delia, terrified at this strange phenomenon, weary with her constrained and difficult position, and anxious to return to her own room before her absence should be discovered, commenced her descent, but found it infinitely more difficult than the ascent, partly because her eyes were now of no service, and partly, also, because her muscles, cramped and strained by over-exertion, refused to obey her will as promptly as before. At last, in attempting to step from the stem of the woodbine to the railing of the balcony, her foot slipped, she fell forward, seized the stick supporting the window of her own room, and dragged it down, thus causing the window to fall violently, and fasten with a spring, which Delia had failed to discover in opening it. She herself, bruised, breathless, and, more than all, terrified lest the noise of her descent should arouse the house, landed upon the balcony of the bow-window, where she sat for a moment, panting and listening for sounds within the house. Rising at last, she tried the sashes of the window behind her, found them all fast, looked hopelessly over the balustrade to the ground, full fifteen feet below, and then, reaching as far out as she could, made a desperate attempt to raise her own window. In so doing she was attracted by a light within the chamber, a faint and glimmering light, more like that of stars or moon than of a lamp, and yet artificial, for the night had grown black and stormy. Seating herself upon the balustrade, and clinging to the open shutter, Delia leaned over and looked into the room.

To her astonishment, she saw Rosamond, still in the strange garb she had worn during her visit to the third story, standing before the wardrobe, all whose doors were now wide open, and arranging with deliberate care the rich dresses and other garments that hung within. Over one in particular she seemed to linger fondly, and Delia, to her astonishment, recognized in its silken folds and peculiar brocaded figure, the fac-simile of the dress her sister at that moment wore.

"This is where she gets her masquerading costume; and pretending all the while that she could not open those doors without permission," thought Delia, angrily; and she was about to tap upon the window for admission, when Rosamond, turning from the dress, opened one of a set of drawers filling the center of the wardrobe, and taking up a folded and sealed packet, turned it over and over, examined it sadly, and then, suddenly dropping it back into the drawer, began to pace up and down the room, wringing her hands, and weeping bitterly, while the glittering wonder of her golden hair fell like a mantle about her, and the rich folds of the old brocade robe trailed after her in sheeny waves.

Delia, more and more astonished, more and more forced to believe that here was something beyond the mere love-intrigue her jealousy had first suggested, drew back to the balcony and stood wrapt in wondering thought, when a noise close behind her caused her to turn abruptly, and find the figure of a man attentively observing her through the window at her back. As she turned, he seemed about to retreat, but Delia, who had recognized Capt. Page, gesticulated eagerly to him to return and open the window, which, after a moment's hesitation, he did.

"Is it you, Miss Delia?" exclaimed he, offering his hand to help her into the window.

"Yes—can you believe it?" asked Delia, sinking breathlessly upon a chair.

"Hardly; but it is not for me to form, or, at least to express, an opinion upon a lady's conduct," said the captain, gravely.

Delia hesitated. Should she preserve silence, and retire at once to her own room, she could not doubt the unfavorable impression that would remain upon the mind of this gentleman, who, no longer young, preserved the traditions in which he had been bred, regarding the position and demeanor of women. To explain, was to sacrifice Rosamond. To refuse to do so, was to sacrifice herself. Delia soon resolved which was the better course for her own interests.

She rose and approached Capt. Page, who had withdrawn a few steps toward his own room.

"I cannot bear to have you think badly of me, whether you express the opinion or not," said she, humbly. "But, tell me, is it wrong for me to look after my sister, as Rosamond allows me to call her?"

"No; surely that cannot be called other than most amiable and laudable conduct," ceremoniously replied the captain.

"Well, that is what I have been doing; upon my word it is. Capt. Page, Mr. Percival is your room-mate; tell me, did you leave him there when you came to open this window?"

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"No, Miss Delia, I did not."

"Nor has he been there to-night, has he?"

"No; since you ask the question, I must truthfully reply that he has not."

"And shall I tell you where he has been?"

"No, Miss Delia; I have no desire to ask. My friend's secrets are sacred from my investigation."

"But, for my own sake, I must explain. You found me in a very ambiguous situation, and you must listen to my explanation. I had reason to believe that Rosamond had left me to go and meet Mr. Percival. An hour ago I heard their voices in the rooms above—those rooms which Mr. Percival has so often assured us were inaccessible; reluctant to believe in such culpable imprudence, and knowing no other way to reach the third story, I clambered out upon the railing of the balcony, and gained a position where I could look into one of the upper windows. Capt. Page, I saw Mr. Percival and Rosamond Thorne with my own eyes; and I saw him kiss her hands, and she leaned upon his shoulder——"

"Miss Delia, I can consent to listen no longer," interrupted Capt. Page, in much agitation. "I have no sort of right to inquire into Miss Thorne's or Mr. Percival's behavior; nor had I the least claim to the explanation of your own movements, which you have kindly given me. If I can be of any service to you, command me; but I sincerely trust you will pardon me, when I say that I consider it dishonorable in the highest degree to play the spy and eaves-dropper upon one's friends, either directly or at second-hand."

"Capt. Page! Do you apply those names to me?" demanded Delia.

"Madam, I never in my life was guilty of a quarrel with a lady, and I shall not begin to-night," said the captain, offering his arm to escort his antagonist to her own room;, but Delia scornfully rejecting it, walked away without another word; while Capt. Page, slowly and sadly pacing along the gallery to his chamber, muttered, "Poor Rosamond! poor, foolish Rosamond!"

CHAPTER XII.

DELIA'S first movement upon entering her room, and finding it dark and deserted, was to procure a light, her next to examine the seals over the locks of the wardrobe. They were perfect, and bore the same curious device which she had at first noticed upon them—a monogram of the letters AB, curiously interwoven and ornamented.

"A. B.," repeated Delia to herself. "That must stand for Ann Bartram, and the seal is, probably, somewhere in the house. If I could only find it, or make one of bread, as I have heard of persons doing. I want to see the inside of that wardrobe; and if Rosamond opens it slyly, why should not I? I will do it to-morrow night, and I will see what is in that sealed paper, too."

Revolving her purpose, Delia threw herself upon the bed, and, spite of a disturbed mind and guilty conscience, slept soon and soundly; for it is only when the gilded newness of the fetters of vice is worn away, that they corrode and waste the life and strength of him who has voluntarily assumed them.

The next morning, at his usual hour of arising, Walton Percival presented himself in his apartment, which, as we have said, was shared with Capt. Page.

"Good-morning, Page," he said, yawning and rubbing his eyes. "Where do you suppose I spent the night?"

"Don't know, I'm sure," briefly replied his friend.

"On the sofa, in the library. I sat reading until a little after midnight, and then, feeling tired, lay down upon the sofa. The next thing I knew, there was Ichabod shaking me by the shoulder, and the sun shining in at the window."

"Indeed. That is rather remarkable," commented the captain, in a tone of such undisguised contempt, that Percival turned from his toilet operations to stare at him.

"What do you mean, Page? What is remarkable?" he asked, in undisguised surprise.

"Your story."

"Remarkable? Why? Oh! I see, you think I was tipsy."

"Oh, no!"

"What then? What, in the name of common sense, do you mean?"

"It is not in the least necessary for you to explain your movements during the night, and I beg you will not attempt it, that is all."

The captain was leaving the room, after this curt speech, when Walton sprang before him to the door, and set his back against it.

"Capt. Page, will you be so good as to explain your meaning?" asked he, very quietly.

Thus adjured, the elder man paused, drew himself up, fixed his stern eyes upon the flushed and angry face of his junior, and said,

"I mean that I already know so much of your affairs, although through no effort of my own, that it grieves me to the heart to hear you

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trying to deceive me by a false account of them. Let me pass, Percival, and in an hour or two I will relieve you of my presence in this house."

"What can you be talking about?" said Percival, in mingled astonishment and anger.

The captain's grizzled mustache curled in a scornful smile.

"Perhaps you will understand me, when I say that I am aware of your visit to the third-story of this house, last night," said he, contemptuously. "And now, sir, let me pass. I wish to leave this room."

"Not until you hear me, sir," replied Percival, sternly. "For although your words are utterly incomprehensible to me, your manner assures me that you are laboring under some unfortunate delusion. Capt. Page, upon my word and honor as a gentleman, I never have been in the third-story of this house, either last night, or at any other time."

"What, sir! Walton, I have known you from a boy; I knew and was the friend of your father before you, and I would rather have seen you in your grave, than have heard those words from your lips; for, young man, you were heard, seen, watched for many minutes, in a room of the third-story of this house, and not only you but another, whom you are right in attempting to shield; but not by a lie, Percival; not by the sacrilege of pledging your honor to a most dishonorable deception. Bah! Let me go, I say—I cannot breathe the air of this room a moment longer."

And grasping the young man by the shoulder, the stern, old warrior removed him from his path, and strode out of the room.

Pale as death, his teeth set, and his hands clenched, his mind filled with a whirl of angry emotions, Percival stood for a moment looking after him; then rapidly finished his toilet and followed him down stairs.

He found the captain standing at the open door, leading from the back of the long hall into the orchard. Going directly up to him, he said, in a low voice,

"Come with me into the garden, if you please."

"Certainly," replied the sailor, with haughty courtesy, and without another word followed his host. When quite out of sight from the house, Percival paused, and turning to his friend, with a face as calm and stern as his own, said,

"Capt. Page, I call upon you to explain, clearly and distinctly, the insinuations you made just now. I do not know what you mean, or who has been filling your ears with lies; but this I do know, that you have no right whatever to doubt my word, or to believe that I am capable of falsely pledging my honor to any statement whatever; and although I cannot say what is involved in your suspicion of my having been in the third-story of this house last night, or to whom you refer as my companion, I do again most solemnly declare, and if need be swear, that I have never been in that part of this house; that I know of no means of getting there, if I wished to do so; and that I had no companion last night, neither seeing or hearing a human being from the time I parted with you at eleven o'clock, until I met you again this morning in our chamber. Now, please to explain yourself as distinctly as I have done."

Capt. Page fixed his steady eyes upon those of the young man, who met them unflinchingly. Then he extended his hand, and slowly said,

"I must believe you, Walton; and I beg pardon for having supposed it possible that you could lie; but this is very strange—very strange, indeed! nor, I am sorry to say, can I explain myself, without implicating another person, which, of course, I will not do. Can you be satisfied to let the matter rest here, Walton?"

"Hardly; but, if you are bound in honor not to expose your informant, I suppose I must not urge you. As you say, captain, this place is filled with marvels, and this appears to be the most complicated of all. Wait until you hear my experiences since we came here."

And in short, clear sentences, Percival gave the details of those adventures through which we have accompanied him, not omitting the vigil which Rosamond Thorne had held with him, or the remarkable likeness of the female apparition to his cousin. In hearing these two latter circumstances, the captain started, pulled at his gray mustache, and cast one keen glance into Percival's unconscious face, but offered neither comment or question until he had finished, then he said,

"Long ago, I was forced to believe that there are matters in heaven and earth deeper than my philosophy; and although credulity is a sign of weakness, a pig-headed incredulity is no sign of strength; so let us accept the theory that there are other than physical manifestations of life in this house, and go to work in accordance with that theory. According to you, these manifestations principally resolve themselves into the apparitions of a young woman, a man, and an old woman; the two first of whom appear anxious to convey some intelligence, or effect some object; and the last of whom, the

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old woman, seems merely anxious to annoy and drive away the human intruders upon her domain. Is that all correct?"

"Perfectly."

"And the closed third-story of the house, and the conduct of the housekeeper have, in your mind, a distinct connection with these three apparitions, and their manifestations?"

"Yes. That woman's indignation, but not surprise, when I speak of them; her determination to keep the upper-part of the house free from intrusion, while, at the same time, I feel sure she knows of some way of reaching it; a dozen little occurrences, which I will not detail; and, above all, something in her manner and appearance convince me that, if she chose to explain these events, she could."

"Well, then, force her to explain."

"How can it be done?"

The captain twirled his mustache thoughtfully.

"If it were a man aboard ship," muttered he. "But an old woman—it's a difficult matter to manage."

The two men paced thoughtfully up and down. At last the younger said,

"Perhaps Rosamond could help us."

The captain shook his head dubiously.

"Miss Thorne is a charming young lady, and nobody has more admiration and respect for the sex than I have," said he. "But the dear souls are so romantic, and so headstrong, that it is extremely difficult to control them, when once you allow them to take the helm, or even to put a hand upon it."

The younger man, however, suggested,

"A woman's wit is generally an overmatch for a man's method in solving such irregular problems as this."

The captain elevated his eyebrows, and got the end of the gray mustache between his teeth, his ultimate gesture of perplexity and hesitation, before he answered; then he said,

"I had infinitely rather every petticoat were out of the matter before we take it up; but if you insist upon calling your cousin into council, I must yield. I must stipulate, however, that Miss Delia Thorne and your aunt shall not be informed of our proceedings."

"Agreed! And now let us go to breakfast. After that we will call Rosamond out here, and have a consultation."

But the strange series of events which, since the arrival of Percival and his party at Bartram's Holme, had seemed to control and direct their footsteps, was destined to arrive at a crisis in a manner, and through agencies peculiar to itself, and not to be directed by either of these men.

Mrs. Nancy did not appear at breakfast; and Ichabod, when sent up stairs to summon her, returned with the tidings that both her doors were locked, and that no sound was to be heard from within, in answer to his knock.

"She is sick; we must force an entrance into her room, and take care of her," said Rosamond, compassionately.

"I don't believe she is sick; she is, probably, sullen, and don't choose to answer," suggested Delia.

"We must find out. Ichabod, get a ladder, and see if you can enter one of the windows: gently, of course; and not at all, if the woman does not need help. If she does, unlock the door and let us know," said Percival.

Ichabod, with a suppressed grin upon his face, left the room. But, five minutes later, he returned, saying, "Every window is fast, sir, and the shutters closed inside."

"Then we must force the door," said Percival, rising, and following the servant into the lobby.

"There'll be no need to force it, sir," said Ichabod, mysteriously, showing a key which he held. "Somebody just throwed this key down stairs, right at my head, sir. I'll bet it is the key of Nancy's chamber."

(TO BE CONCLUDED.)

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SIVOLI'S SUITORS.
BY KATHARINE F. WILLIAMS
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SIVOLI'S album was missing.

"Have you seen it, mamma?" she said.

Mamma smiled, then answered in a way that seemed to betoken superior information. Sivoli pouted, and said no more.

Sivoli was properly named Cecile, but every one preferred her pretty nick-name. Only M. Hamilton, the boarder, who occupied the second floor of Mme. Laurent's dwelling, addressed her ceremoniously as Mlle. Cecile.

Sivoli was pretty, though she pouted. A white, opaque complexion, eyes and hair of jet, a look half-sweet, half-haughty, and a perfect shape—these things in part describe her. For the rest, she was affectionate, caressing; a glint of sunshine in the sombre house. A little willful at times, but oftenest duteous.

Mme. Laurent was a widow, and Sivoli was her only child. Her husband had died, leaving her but a small income, the year after he had come from France, which country he had left in hopes to better his fortunes in America. Instead, he found a grave. Mme. Laurent's narrow means were eked out by the sum she received from M. Hamilton, the boarder, to whom allusion has been already made. He was a handsome, reserved man, past his first youth, and devoted to study. His rooms were filled with all manner of beautiful and curious things; strange contrast to the remainder of the abode, which was bare as the poverty of years could make it.

One fine morning, the album was again in its accustomed place. Sivoli let it lie a full half-hour, and disdained to look At the end of that time curiosity prevailed over pique. Rapidly turning the leaves, she was arrested by a page hitherto blank, a charming little scene in water-colors, and the initials A. F. B.

"Oh, Ciel!" exclaimed Mme. Laurent, looking over her daughter's shoulder, and surveying, hands clasped in ecstasy, the pretty landscape.

"Is it not exquisite, my child?"

"It is well enough," said Sivoli, coldly. "But I wished for nothing of the sort."

"It is an admirable *morceau*," madame insisted. "Do you not say the same, M. Hamilton?"

The person thus addressed came forward. "Permit me," he said, taking the book from Sivoli. "It is exceedingly well done. What do you complain of here, Mlle. Cecile?"

"I?" she answered, blushing. "I find no fault, save that M. Berard took my album without permission."

"*Ma foi!*" said madame, laughing. "What want of deference!"

"M. Berard is, indeed, unpardonable," said M. Hamilton, a look of amusement lighting up his serious brown eyes. "Still, such a pretty decoration should soften your just anger; and there, I suppose, are his initials—A. F. B."

"Yes; his names are Armand François."

"Can any young lady's heart be proof against an Armand? And an Armand who paints such pictures in honor of her bright eyes? I shall think you most ungrateful, Mlle. Cecile, if you do not thank M. Berard, when he comes to-night, with your sweetest smile."

M. Hamilton went to his own apartment, and Sivoli remained, flushed and resentful. "He treats me like a child!" she thought. "I to be captivated by a pretty name! 'Ungrateful,' too. Pray, what should I be grateful for? If he chooses to follow me everywhere with his ridiculous homage, it is no affair of mine."

Yet one would not be ugly, even in the eyes of an unwelcome suitor. Thus Sivoli, as night drew near, sought her own room, and pondered over her toilet. It was a dull bower for so bright a bird. The walls were bare, and the floor was uncarpeted. But all was spotlessly neat. There were no trifles, however, lying about, the overflow of a girl's lavish wardrobe; and the closet, when opened, gave no hint of gay attire within. Sivoli brushed her silky locks to jettier lustre; hung pendants of coral in the plain gold hoops, which of a morning decorated or disfigured her pretty ears; then she sighed for a robe of fresh tint and dainty texture. Unattainable! On, therefore, with the familiar skirt and boddice! Brightened with cherry ribbons, shaded at throat and wrist by delicate lace, it was very well. Few people, looking at her, would have noticed any lack.

M. Hamilton did not, for one. He often sat with the family of an evening, talking or reading, as he chose; an inmate of such long standing that no ceremony was observed with him.

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To-night, from behind his book, he watched Sivoli's every motion. He found repressed impatience visible in all. She busied herself a little space with the bright-hued silks of her embroidery-frame; then threw them by for a volume, of which she found but a page or two worthy of perusal; she opened the piano, played a few strains, and then paused, lost in thought. Noting these things, M. Hamilton's face grew grave; but when Sivoli's eyes met his, he smiled again.

"Have patience, mademoiselle," he said; "it is early yet. You cannot be doomed much longer to our dull society."

"It is not dull to me," she responded. "I wish we were secure from interruption. Then one could sit down quietly and enjoy the evening."

M. Hamilton found this hypocrisy of a young girl sufficiently transparent. Still, it showed her kind heart; she was unwilling to let him see how uncongenial was his sober, middle-age to her bright youth. Soon the bell rang, and M. Berard was ushered in.

This was a youth of fair person and good mien, not wanting, either, in intelligence. His devotion to Sivoli was evident in every gesture. It interfered a little with his ease of manner, made him color painfully when she addressed him, caused some hesitation in his usually fluent speech. Why did M. Hamilton take a sarcastic pleasure in noticing these things?

"So, so," he reflected, and his lip curled slightly, "this is what all the world would call natural and fitting. I am too old—over my books I have grown even older than my years. If the spirit matured with the body, how well it would be, if we grew indifferent to the charm of youth in proportion to our loss of it. For the rest, here is a young pair, quite suited to each other; let me to my book, and leave them to their wooing."

He held so well to this resolve that Sivoli, piqued by his persistent neglect, devoted herself in earnest to the fascination of the suitor. Her smiles were not so valueless to everybody, she thought, with defiance; and those who prized should have them. Poor M. Berard brightened in the sunny atmosphere; his spirit expanded with a sort of adoring gratitude that made the little parlor a Paradise. Meanwhile, the student's brow grew darker and more grave, and ere long he excused himself. In his own room he could indulge, unobserved, whatever reflections suited his mood.

As for Sivoli, alone, a few hours later, she could have cried with vexation. Ever since her childhood M. Hamilton had been of the household—a central figure there. Always she had held him in utmost esteem; his taste, his opinion, had been for her the unerring standard of propriety. In return, he had bestowed kindness and regard, on which she fearlessly relied. And now, it seemed, he was ready to give her up at once; at the coming of the first applicant he was willing to yield all right in her, and forget the pleasant tie of years. Sivoli felt that she should not have done thus; she would have contested, with all her girl's strength, the right of any one who had wished to usurp her place with him. Why could not all have remained as it was? Why must this useless homage come in to no purpose, but to show her how little she was valued? Sivoli sighed.

Early next morning there was a ring at the hall-door, and the girl, answering it, returned with a bouquet for mademoiselle. The spirit of defiance had deserted Sivoli by this time; she wished the offering back in its native green-house; still, it was not easy to refuse an attention so delicate and so little marked. There was clearly no resource but to accept it, and to thank M. Berard at his next visit for the courtesy.

But the youth did not content himself with offering flowers. By-and-by there came an invitation to the theatre. Not, indeed, for Sivoli; for madame, her mother, whom, it was suggested, Mlle. Cecile would, perhaps, accompany. Mme. Laurent accepted, graciously, for both.

Sivoli regarded the project with mingled longing and distrust. All her young fancy caught at a pleasure so new and so entrancing; yet what meaning might not be attached to her compliance? She wavered, wished; then steeled her heart.

"I do not care to go, mamma," she said.

"Not go!" exclaimed madame. "When monsieur has been at such pains! When the tickets are procured, the carriage ordered!"

"I am sorry," returned Sivoli. "He should not have counted on such ready acceptance. He would then have been spared unnecessary trouble."

"Ungrateful girl!" cried the mother; "you little deserve that any one should try to please you. Moderate your sarcasm, however, I had given consent, never dreaming that you could show such foolish obstinacy."

"I do not," rejoined Sivoli. "Neither am I ungrateful. I would go, and willingly, but you know what M. Berard will imagine, if I do."

"And why not?" asked madame. "Child,

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you are fastidious to arrogance. M. Berard is your equal in age and family, your superior in fortune. For whom are you waiting?"

"For the prince in disguise," said Sivoli, gayly. "Mamma, why are you so anxious to be rid of me? I only wish to stay with you always."

"Yes," returned madame, dryly. "You will stay very dutifully, without doubt, till you wish to go. They manage these things better in France; I did not dare, when a girl, to act so—but you are of this land and its fashions. For the rest, I have already accepted the invitation; it is too late to withdraw. Surely, you would not condemn either the poor young man or myself to the absurdity of a *tete-a-tete* through an entire evening. Go this once; and hereafter, if you will, you may decline all courtesies from him."

The point once established, Sivoli could not but feel a kindling of youthful spirits through all the annoyance of the occasion. To go anywhere was so exciting an innovation on her recluse existence. The needful toilet was not easily compassed. Madame brought forth some hoarded fineries of her earlier days, not very promising one would have said; but from these slight materials French skill and taste devised a dress that was charming enough—at least, when Sivoli was in it. M. Hamilton watched her as she awaited the carriage, the sense of festivity brightening her eyes and color. She had never been so lovely, and he convinced himself anew of the wisdom of coolness and reserve on his own part.

I am quite proud of my Sivoli as she sits in the crowded theatre. People whose vision once alights on her are sure to turn and look again. She is so fresh, so girlish, and so graceful, with something irresistibly piquant in her quaint dress and ornaments. To her it is a scene of enchantment, this spacious interior, blazing with light, and filled with a gayly-dressed throng. The curtain, rising, reveals a world undreamed-of. Sivoli is no captious critic; she finds the illusion perfect. Forgetting the audience, her own party, everything, she follows the fortunes of the play. M. Berard watches her almost as intently as she watches the stage. Madame smiles at the spectacle of her absorbed delight, and draws from it the happiest auguries. Such scenes, she thinks, must dispose the girl's fancy favorably toward one who can confer pleasures upon her as often as she wills.

From a distant box other eyes, too, regarded her. Long since M. Hamilton had ceased to care for amusements of this character; but Sivoli's delight reproached him. Why did he never guess the pleasure he might bestow? Why did he leave it for some one else to give her the first taste of enjoyment so rare and so enthralling? He recalled his own youth, its enthusiasm, its ecstasies, and sighed to think how long ago they faded. He has never remembered till within the last few weeks that Sivoli could wish for any other life than that calm one which contented him. If he had bethought himself earlier, might he not have enlisted her girlish gratitude in his favor? And then he scorned the selfishness of the thought. Could he have taken advantage of her youth, her inexperience, to buy regard from her as one coaxes kisses with *bonbons* from a child? That would have been too base, and the regard itself too poor.

The play was over, the spell dissolved. As they left the theatre, Sivoli fancied that she caught in the throng a glimpse of a familiar figure. The next moment she felt the absurdity of the idea. "It is only because I am always thinking of him!" she accused herself. And the next morning at breakfast, when M. Hamilton asked, with quiet kindness, how she enjoyed the play, she felt afresh how wild was the suspicion.

Days succeeded each other—days in which Sivoli grew older and sometimes sad. Existence had changed. It was no longer possible to live, as once, without care or thought, happy in each hour as it passed. This regard, which she had neither sought nor prized, seemed to have altered everything for her. No longer content and secure, she found herself continually questioning how far she was valued. It is not pleasant to find yourself nothing, suddenly, to a friend whom you esteem. Sivoli felt this. If any tenderer sentiment mingled with the feeling, she was too inexperienced to recognize it.

M. Hamilton, meanwhile, guarded his speech and manner. If a sweet look, a kind word of Sivoli's sometimes surprised him out of his calm, set his heart beating with the tumult of ten years before, he endeavored to remember how useless and absurd were such emotions, leading only to suffering and disappointment. He remained more than ever in his own apartments, whither the young girl's image still pursued him. Often, recalling the evening of the play, he was tempted to gratify himself in witnessing anew her delight; but reason checked him. How unwise to court a danger already too powerful? His wisest plan was to

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see Sivoli as little as possible; to let the course of her true love run as smoothly as might be, but to spare himself the pain of witnessing it. Occasionally, however, this philosophy failed him; there came hours when he yielded to the happiness of being with her, and put all thought of the future by. At such times Sivoli, too, was at her happiest. The shy, wistful affection that, scarce suspected, lurked in her heart, sunned itself in his kind words, and kinder glances. But too often the next morning froze her hopes again, and she believed, from his grave brow and serious mien, that his books, his pursuits, were all to him, and she but an unregarded trifle.

Mme. Laurent had her troubles no less. M. Berard's assiduities did not fail, but Sivoli would not learn to receive them properly. It was madame who was obliged to be amiable and entertaining, when Sivoli should have saved her the trouble. The long evenings were fearfully wearisome to the young girl; she came to hate the very sound of the bell that announced their visitor; and how doubly unwelcome was the sight of the young man himself, carefully dressed, admirably well-gloved, and full of devotion most respectful, yet most ardent. To be rude was not in Sivoli's nature; but this regard chilled her to silence. It was Mme. Laurent who had to make friendly inquiries after the well-being of M. Berard's mother, his aunt, his venerable grandmother; to exchange congratulations or condolences on the state of the weather, and go laboriously through the conventional round of small nothings. Sivoli vouchsafed no aid. She had held mamma to her promise, and refused, decidedly, every invitation to theatre or concert.

Meanwhile, M. Hamilton, from his own apartment, heard an occasional murmur of voices, and, by the aid of fancy, pictured a brilliant and charming scene, at which he looked perpetually, though the sight gave him continual pain. He never dreamed of Sivoli's *ennui*, nor of all the heavy work poor Mme. Laurent had to perform.

She grew seriously anxious at last—the prudent mother. She feared that the suitor's mood of patient worship would not last forever; yet how could she induce Sivoli to meet the change?

"M. Hamilton," she said, one morning, "I wish you would speak to that foolish child. She knows nothing of what is best for her, nor what she really wants. She has such sincere respect for your opinion that I am sure, if you advised her, she would be influenced."

Greatly to the good lady's surprise, M. Hamilton drew back quite stiffly, and declined all interference, without even waiting for her to explain in what particular she desired his aid. As often as the subject recurred to her mind did his demeanor puzzle her. What could have offended him? What had caused such a change in his ordinarily calm and courteous manner?

M. Hamilton reproached himself in no small degree for his ungraciousness, and feared to have betrayed his feelings. Yet the very memory of the request was painful. "Am I so old?" he thought. "Is it impossible one should surmise that some susceptibility might still be left in me? Pshaw! what am I saying? Have I not done my best to conceal every trace of emotion? Ah, Sivoli! dear child! how little you guess all I have felt and could feel for you, old as I am, and far removed from all your sympathies!"

Then an uneasy curiosity possessed him to learn why his intervention had been sought. Was not the affair progressing, as he had supposed, prosperously toward the happiest end? Could Sivoli be coquetting? No! she was too frank, too true-hearted for that! Could she be indifferent? His own eyes, he thought, had assured him to the contrary. There was some girlish pique, caprice—perhaps a lovers'-quarrel going on. Certainly, of all things in this world, it least concerned him. He would think of it no more; and having thus decided, thought of little else.

As it chanced, he found Sivoli alone in the parlor that very afternoon; through the half-open door he had caught a glimpse of her listless attitude, and look of weariness and dejection. His heart yearned to cheer her; at sight of her trouble he forgot his own. As he entered she blushed deeply, and took up the sewing which lay neglected beside her. It was long since any words had passed between the two, save the merest exchange of daily courtesies; both were conscious of reserve, restraint, in meeting thus alone. All the pretty willfulness was gone from Sivoli's manner; whatever the cause, it was evident, thought M. Hamilton, that she was suffering.

"Mademoiselle," he said, kindly, "you surely are not happy. Is there nothing I can do to aid you? Believe me, I am most anxious——"

Sivoli's maiden pride took quick alarm; she drew back, cold and distant. "Nothing disturbs me," she averred. "I am perfectly well. Monsieur can comprehend that to be watched, remarked-upon, is not agreeable."

"Pardon me!" blundered poor M. Hamilton. "I surely have not meant to be officious. But

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I thought I had understood from madame, your mother, that something was amiss."

"What!" said Sivoli, very pale and cold. "Mamma has been speaking of me to you—asking your advice, your intervention?"

"I know not what she asked, since I refused to listen."

"You did well! Pray continue your refusal whenever my affairs shall be discussed," she answered.

"Mademoiselle," said M. Hamilton, with something like indignation, "this haughtiness does not become you. However you may resent it, my wish is only for your happiness."

"Prove it, then, by leaving me at peace in future;" and the interview would have ended in a very lofty manner, only that Sivoli's composure suddenly gave way, and she burst into tears. M. Hamilton essayed to soothe her, but she repulsed his efforts.

"To think," she said, flashing reproachful glances at him through her tears, while her voice shook with emotion, "that you should turn against me, too!"

"I!" exclaimed M. Hamilton, cut to the heart by the cruelty of the accusation, and the vehemence with which it was urged. "Never! I know nothing of the circumstances; but if M. Berard has done anything to grieve you——"

"M. Berard!" said Sivoli, with infinite scorn. "As if his conduct imported anything to me!"

"Be careful, dear child! Don't let resentment carry you too far. Remember, all your happiness may be at stake."

"My happiness, indeed! How could it be influenced by that—that *boy*. But monsieur seems very anxious to advocate his cause," she added.

"You are unjust," returned her companion, quite desperate at this persistent misconstruction, "or you never would accuse me of advocating a cause so fatal to my own wishes; I do not say my hopes, for I know very well that I had never any reason to hope."

Sivoli's eyes fell; her cheeks burned with blushes. She must have understood his meaning, yet she uttered no word of rebuke, or of defiance. A gleam of joy, strangely contradictory of the words he had last uttered, flashed through M. Hamilton's mind.

"Sivoli," he said, with eagerness, "answer me one question. Can I have been mistaken all this time? Do you not care for that young man?"

"Not in the least, monsieur."

"And me, Sivoli—could you care for me?"

She looked up shyly, her eyes still wet. "That makes two questions," she said, "and you were to ask but one."

"Dearest, don't trifle with me."

No word passed Sivoli's lips, but her glance answered him fully.

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A NIGHT'S LODGING.
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A NIGHT'S LODGING.

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It was twelve o'clock on the last night of August; and bright, beautiful moonlight flooded the city streets with glory, and suggested dreams of loveliness way off among crystal waters and embowering trees, whither every one who was any one was supposed to be sojourning.

But the train of the —— railroad due at nine, P. M., and delayed by an engine across the track until this late hour, poured forth a crowd of living freight at the up-town depot, who had returned, in spite of the season and the moonlight, to their city quarters. The temper of most of the freight had not been improved by the delay; and babies cried, men swore, and women scolded; while hack-drivers energetically added their mite to the general confusion, an element in which they seem to revel, and deafened every one near them with their hideous cries.

Two persevering Jehus were clamoring for the possession of a young gentleman, whose fine face was eloquently expressive of disgust at the situation in which he found himself; and the movements of his figure had in them an air of princely haughtiness. Mr. Stuart Neale was disgusted, intensely disgusted, not only at being deposited, at this hour of the night, in such a scene of vulgar confusion, where every face he saw seemed only more uninteresting than the last; but he was disgusted to the inmost recesses of his poetic soul at being brought to the city at all.

For the moonlight was silvering a certain hotel-piazza hundreds of miles away, and illuminating a face of more than ordinary beauty; possibly upturned, at that very moment, to some six feet of humanity, and listening, with the artless expression he remembered so well, to certain silly words (silly, because spoken by some one else) that men utter to women when, in the language of other men, they "make fools of themselves."

Or, perhaps, she was on the lake, in that little, fairy-like shell of a boat that she managed so gracefully, and wearing what she called her "Undine dress," pale, glancing green, with something white, and fleecy, and glistoning, thrown over her head. And, perhaps—how his blood boiled to think of it!—that empty-headed coxcomb, Dewsbury, who danced so well that he might have made his fortune with his feet, was lisping *his* nothings to her, with all the advantages of water, moonlight, and solitude.

Or, still less probable, possibly she was lying asleep on her couch, with the moonlight streaming in her windows, and lighting up face and figure with sculptured beauty, while she dreamed, in her graceful slumber, of him. Psha! that was scarcely likely; but what was she doing at that identical moment, he wondered? And what had *he* been doing all these weeks, that he had not gathered this exquisite Violet, so shy, and tender, and beautiful?

She was a perfect little wild-rose beauty, this evidently unsophisticated Violet; drawn by her worldly aunt from some quiet village home to shine as a fashionable belle, and give additional *eclat* to that lady's well-established position. That was just it, he believed; and Mrs. Clarkly was as watchful of her pretty niece as though dangerous animals had been prowling around to carry her off. It really seemed to Mr. Neale that *he* had been regarded in this light; for a sort of invisible barrier was between them every time he tried to come to any definite understanding with the bewitching little Violet, whose soft eyes seemed to express volumes of sympathy for his disappointment, while her words and actions were rigidly proper.

The very night before he left, did he not, with infinite pains and strategy, decoy the slippery damsel into a shaded walk, and fairly begin a passionate disclosure of his wretchedness? Just then, however, a voice shrieked his name in accents of the utmost alarm; and he ran to find Mrs. Clarkly in an adjacent walk, respectfully regarded by the mildest of dogs, who would have declined such a meal under any circumstances; but the lady gasped out rather affectedly,

"I am *so* afraid of hydrophobia! And as I had just caught a glimpse of you, I could not help calling. I am looking for Violet; she promised to dance with Mr. Dewsbury, and I do not wish her to offend him."

But Violet was not to be seen until they returned to the ball-room, when they behold

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her floating like a sylph, and smiling on Mr. Dewsbury in the most benevolent manner.

The glory of the ball had vanished for Stuart Neale. He dashed up to his room, and packed his trunk in a savage manner, ready for his journey on the morrow; and thought, almost with fierce relief, of the troublesome call his partner had received to his dying father in a distant town, which obliged him to leave all the delights of this charming watering-place, when every one else intended to remain at least two weeks longer.

Stuart had a mother and two sisters at the hotel—the latter very pretty, stylish girls, and much more amiable than their class generally; and they had sagely whispered, *Prenez-garde*, when they saw their handsome brother not only losing his heart, but, it seemed to them, every remnant of common sense, for "that artful little Violet."

But Stuart Neale reasoned exactly like other men in similar circumstances, that it was astonishing how women, even the best of them, were always fastening upon some sweet little specimen of their own sex to abuse and persecute; especially if brothers or lovers seemed capable of appreciating her charms. He would quite have agreed with the worthy of Dickens' creation, who observed, "Rum creeturs, sir, is women!" although, with his superior advantage, he might have phrased it differently. And Mrs. and the Misses Neale, being sensible women, came to the wise conclusion that, since brother Stuart would take hold of "the pretty fire," he must just be allowed to get a serious burn—when he would, undoubtedly, drop it.

It was quite a relief, however, that he was called away, and that he would be obliged to attend steadily to business; although an empty house at night, during the two weeks that they intended to remain, might be rather favorable for sentimentalizing.

That disappointing Violet really seemed to cling to her aunt's skirts, and thus frustrated all his attempts at a private farewell; but, consoling himself with the thought that he would write at his leisure, Stuart Neale turned his back upon green fields, and his face toward the city.

He fretted at the delay, for he had anticipated reaching the house at a reasonable hour; when James, the respectable man-servant, who had been left in charge, would be ready to receive him, and light him to his own comfortable bed-chamber. Now, however, James would certainly be asleep at the very top of the house; and as he slept at about ten-man power, rousing him might prove no easy matter. He would have the pleasure, he thought, of letting himself in with his night-key, and stumbling through a dark house to his dormitory—possibly being shot, on the way, by James for a house-breaker.

The prospect was not agreeable; and compared with the moonlight picture on the lake or veranda, it roused in him a general feeling of injury, and made him stalk with so lordly an air toward the most inviting-looking he could see, which happened to belong to neither of the contending Jehus, but to one who had stood aloof as hopeless of success. The favored charioteer cracked his whip triumphantly in the faces of his brethren, and bowing deferentially, asked "his honor where he'd plase to be driven," received his orders for west Thirty-Fourth street, and put his fiery steeds in motion.

"Oh, Violet!" thought his passenger, sadly, "every step seems to take me further away from you. What a wretched night I shall spend in the miserable uncertainty of not knowing how you are employed!"

It is not at all probable that any thought about ignorance being bliss entered the young gentleman's head; but he did think how miserably gloomy and deserted the city looked—quite forgetful of the fact that it was an hour at which honest people were usually in their beds; and he considered himself very ill-used in being obliged to leave Paradise for such a dreary place.

Of course, the Irishman stopped at the wrong number, and Stuart got out and walked to the right one—remarking on the excessive gloominess of those endless blocks of brown-stone fronts, so exactly alike, that a man might live in them all in turn without finding out his mistake. To-night, they had a particularly forbidding look—solid and severe, like the Egyptian temples; and the only pedestrians in the deserted street were some dissipated cats, who were not troubled with grave reflections. How every footstep echoed on that stone-flight, and how utterly hopeless the house looked of anything like human occupancy.

He rang; but, as he had not expected an answer, he was not disappointed. Twice, three times the bell sounded, seeming to wake up all the echoes in the street; but it did not wake James. Having concluded, by this time, that it would be more agreeable to ring from the inside, Mr. Stuart Neale let himself in with his night-key, and plied the bell-wire with fresh vigor. Ring—ring—ring; but it was like calling spirits from the vasty deep—the spirit that he called wouldn't come.

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"After all," he thought, when he felt tired of ringing, "why should I disturb poor James? honest, hard-working man, who is, probably, deep in his first nap, and would scarcely be sufficiently delighted at my return to enjoy being waked in the middle of the night to be informed of it. No, no! *requiescat in pace*, honest sleepy-head, while I thread the dark labyrinths of this silent fortress, until I am fortunate enough to find matches and strike a light."

Mr. Neale, although constitutionally a brave man, had a very reasonable dread of pistols fired at random in the dark; and as he knew James to be provided with a staunch revolver for his own protection and that of the house, he would have preferred arousing him by ringing the bell, rather than run the risk of being heard by him on the stairs. It was so long past the hour at which he was due, that he could not blame the man for giving him up for that night.

He groped carefully up the stairs, shuddering involuntarily when his outstretched hand came in sudden contact with the marble bust that stood in the first niche; while frightful stories of ghostly adventure, laid up in boyhood, rushed into his mind, and hurried his steps toward the door of the first sleeping-apartment he could reach. He seized the knob, but it would not yield to his efforts—the door was locked!

He tried the next, and the next, but with the same result; and quite unwillingly, he crept up another flight of stairs to his own room. It was really too exasperating to be locked out of that; and he shook and rattled the knob in frantic indignation.

Every other door was the same; and vowing vengeance on somebody, he was about making a speedy rush to James' quarters to shake him into a sense of present realities; when, suddenly, he remembered hearing his mother, in talking with another lady over their housekeeping arrangements, speak with some pride of having carefully locked up each separate room, leaving only the attic bed-room and the basement sitting-room for the benefit of James; and now she had forgotten to give him the keys.

What, in the world, should he do? He might try a hotel—but what chance of a bed at that hour of the night, and at that season of the year? However, as his choice lay between the hall-floor, with his traveling-bag for a pillow, and making the tour of the various houses of entertainment, he concluded to try the latter alternative.

In the first one he entered, a party of sleepy-looking men in the reading-room eyed him quite severely, and cast anxious glances toward the scant collection of mattresses that were being laid upon the floor by sleepy waiters. This was evidently to be their bivouac for the night. It was a discouraging prospect; but the new-comer made his way to the clerk's desk, and asked for a room quite as though he expected to get it.

That functionary, who was much like a French or Italian count, with a mustache that struck terror into weak-minded beholders, approached as near to the ghost of a smile as his magnificent self-importance would allow, and tried to look over and through Mr. Neale, with the evident expectation of looking him into nothing. But there was something in the gentleman's eyes that arrested his own; and having caught a full glance from those steady orbs, he lowered his crest, and said, almost politely,

"I am afraid, sir, that we can scarcely accommodate you—you see our condition."

Then, hastily turning over the large book before him, he said, musingly, "No. 201, one bed. Will you share a room with another occupant?"

"Certainly not!" was the indignant answer; and shrugging his shoulders, to imply that the interview was terminated, he of the mustache turned carelessly away—and Stuart Neale strode haughtily forth into the night again.

There were plenty more hotels, he thought, and he could try them all; but he tried in vain: all were equally crowded; and then he remembered, for the first time, that a political convention was to meet the next day, and that the city was literally overrun with strangers.

He tried hotel after hotel, for two hours. Then he thought he would spend the night walking the streets. But he found it dreadfully stupid and tiresome. He thought of Johnson and Savage, walking all night around St. James' Square for want of a lodging, with some degree of envy—for had not each a companion? There was some romance in that, as it was the result of unappreciated genius, and it was encircled by the nimbus of a past age and a distant land. But there was nothing in the least romantic in the fact that a young man of modern times, whose pocket-book was well-lined with greenbacks, was locked-out of his mother's house, in New York, and crowded out of accommodations at the hotels.

There was nothing to be done but to go back to Thirty-Fourth street, and to spend what remained of the night on the hall-floor, with his head resting on his soft and downy

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traveling-bag. To Thirty-Fourth street, therefore, he turned.

"Oh, for one of the parlor-sofas!" he said, disconsolately, as he opened the door with his latch-key. "Could his mother have been foolish enough to lock-up the parlors? He tried a door very quietly, still remembering James; and, oh! delicious prospect of comfort and repose! it opened at his touch—and he actually stood in the lofty precincts sacred to visitors, with the sacrilegious determination of stretching his weary limbs on satin-damask and rose-wood.

His shins came suddenly and violently in contact with a graceful little table with sprawling legs; and something fell on the floor with an alarming noise. When he put his hand down to examine, the carpet was wet, and he touched a soft mass that seemed like flowers. He had no matches, and no knowledge of the whereabouts of any; and resolving not to trouble his head about what the morning light would fully explain, he found his way to a sofa—and in five minutes, was so soundly asleep, that he might have been carried off bodily without waking.

The sofa, fortunately, was covered by a linen-jacket, which made it both more agreeable to lie on, and less likely to be injured by the proceedings. All the other satin articles were protected in like manner; but it is scarcely probable that the wanderer would have been deterred by any results from sleeping then and there.

The few hours that remained before morning took to themselves wings, and flew away; and before long moonlight had given place to sunlight. Stuart Neale cared nothing for the flight of time—the affairs of this sublunary sphere had entirely lost their interest; he was wandering with Violet in some isle of the blest, when, horror of horrors! a demon, that had the four heads of as many distracted admirers, seized and bore her off to the water, while the distressed damsel uttered shriek upon shriek.

So vivid was the dream, that the noise of the shrieks wakened him, and he half-opened his eyes to a dim consciousness of being surrounded by figures in a great state of commotion, while the screams continued.

"Now," said a voice that had authority in it, "just get up, will you, young man, and give an account of yourself. How came you here?"

The astonished sleeper opened his eyes widely, and met the steady gaze of an elderly gentleman, who seemed trying to look ferocious, the timid glance of a very lovely young lady, and open mouth of the screaming female, who was evidently lady's-maid, or some sort of functionary; while several heads in the background were thrust eagerly forward, as though to obtain a glimpse of some strange spectacle.

Mr. Neale looked at the carpet, which was blue where red should have been; looked at the walls, where strange pictures met his eye; looked at the table he had knocked over the night before—a gem of ebony and silver, that had never been in his mother's house—and slowly came to the conclusion that he had stumbled into a dreadful scrape. He started to his feet, and glanced almost appealingly at the young lady.

"Father!" exclaimed that very pretty personage, as a sudden light flashed upon her, "there is some mistake here—this gentleman is no house-breaker; he is Mr. Stuart Neale, our next-door neighbor."

Poor Stuart was ready to sink through the floor with mortification; what *must* they think of him for breaking into their house, knocking over their table, and actually spending the night on the drawing-room sofa!

"I hope, sir," said he, after bowing gratefully to the young lady, "that you will kindly look upon this strange conduct as a very stupid mistake on my part—for such, indeed, it is; and I would give much if it had not happened. But when you consider that I am locked out of every part of my mother's house, except the stairs and halls; that I arrived in the city at midnight, and spent an hour or more perambulating the streets in search of a lodging; that I returned, more asleep than awake, and having, as I supposed, entered our own house, tried the parlor-door with little hope of success, and scarcely got in before I was asleep, I think you will not withhold your sympathy. These tiresome houses are so exactly alike——"

"Say no more, Mr. Neale!" exclaimed the old gentleman, warmly. "You are as welcome as possible to your sofa-lodging; and I very much regret that you should have been disturbed by a silly girl's screams, and our own silly conduct afterward. We are neighbors, and, had I known of your situation, it would have afforded me much pleasure to offer you more comfortable quarters. My name is Bluxom; this is my wife, Mrs. Bluxom, and my daughter, Miss Bluxom."

Mrs. Bluxom had only just reached the scene of confusion; a very attractive-looking lady, much like her daughter; but she comprehended the situation in a moment, and said kindly to the embarrassed Stuart,

"It is a great pity, I think, that neighbors

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do not oftener get into each other's houses, even in this manner. New York fashions, in this respect, are outrageously heartless. Just think of living for years separated only by a foot or so of brick-and-mortar from people whom, perhaps, you never speak to as long as you live!"

Stuart warmly admitted the truth of these remarks, and wondered what his sisters had been about not to notice and call upon such a girl as Miss Minnie Bluxom. She had such a very lovely face—not only painted with red and white, but "with brains, sir;" and her voice was music itself. The Bluxoms were strangers in New York, having only moved there in the spring; but they were evidently very cultivated people, who had visited all the places worth seeing in the old world, as well as the new, and who kept their books for use instead of show.

"I must inquire into the damage I have done," said the intruder, stooping to pick up the scattered flowers, and the broken crystal-vase. "I am afraid, Miss Bluxom, that this belongs to your jurisdiction."

"I shall not be very severe," replied the young lady, with a most forgiving smile; "a few worthless flowers, and a glass vase are easily replaced."

"Did any one ever hear the like of that!" exclaimed Matilda, the damsel who had exercised her lungs so vigorously, as she retreated with her comrades to the lower regions. "'Worthless flowers!' If the fine fellow that gave them to her could only hear it! She thought them beautiful enough yesterday; but this gentleman, who got into the house when he'd no business to, seems to have set them all beside themselves. 'A silly girl's screams,' indeed! The next time we have a house-breaker here, I'll let him cut all our throats before I'll raise my voice! Who wouldn't have screamed, I'd like to know, to see a strange man lying on the sofa?"

"Tell us about it, Matilda," they clamored. "How did you come to find him?"

"Why," said Matilda, after a proper degree of urging, "I went in to dust up for the day; and first, I sees the little table knocked over, and the flowers on the floor; and then I sees a man asleep on the sofa. Of course, I hollered; and then they all comes and makes this fuss over him."

"Well, he looks every inch the gentleman," said the cook, appreciatively.

"I've nothing agin his looks," rejoined Matilda. "He's well enough in his place; but I don't want him on the parlor sofa the first thing in the morning, giving me such a turn—I shan't get over it all day."

Mr. Bluxom took hospitable possession of his unexpected visitor, and insisted on conducting him to a dressing-room, where he could enjoy the luxury of a bath, and make himself generally comfortable. A most tempting breakfast was served in such a bright, cheerful room, with birds, and flowers, and nick-nacks, that Stuart resolved to ask his sisters to take a look at it, and arrange their dining-room on the same plan. He felt quite embarrassed by all these kindnesses from perfect strangers; but they were so kindly proffered that he could not doubt their sincerity.

"Now," said Mrs. Bluxom, when their guest rose to go down town, "you must promise us to look on this house as your home—at least, while you are locked out of your own. Your only choice," she added, laughing, as she recalled his experience among the hotels, "is between this and the street."

Mr. Neale went to his business, that morning, with a very confused notion of things generally; and a face that was wonderfully like Minnie Bluxom's rather overshadowed Violet's. In the course of the day, he received a letter from his mother, written in great haste, to tell him where the keys were to be found, and expressing the hope that he was comfortably established in some hotel. Rather a private one, he thought, as he called to mind the kindnesses of his new acquaintances.

This letter reminded him of the one he intended writing Violet; and he had almost seated himself at the task, when he suddenly concluded that it might be just as well to give her the opportunity of missing his attentions a little.

So, the letter was not written; and he did not spend that day, like the preceding one, amid imaginary scenes on a moonlit veranda, or a rippling lake. He found himself quite able, in the afternoon, to enjoy a drive in the Park with his new friends very much; and he returned to music and ices with them in the evening.

James, the serving-man, was infinitely astonished at the apparition of his young master, and was scarcely disposed to credit his tale of having arrived the night before; especially as he labored under the hallucination of being a particularly light sleeper. The keys were found; and Mr. Stuart Neale, now ready to appreciate his comfortable bed, thought it the very softest couch he had ever tried; his room

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and dressing-room seemed palatial in their appointments; and, on the whole, the fastidious young gentleman was rather benefited by his rough experience.

The acquaintance, begun so inauspiciously between the hitherto unknown and unknowing neighbors, progressed rapidly; and "the fine fellow," alluded to by Matilda as presenting the overturned flowers, came to the conclusion that further bouquets were useless. The dreariness of the street, in Mr. Neale's eyes, was now transformed into agreeable quiet; and freedom from the observation of countless neighbors, who might comment upon the frequent interchange of civilities between the two houses.

The nearest hotel graciously accommodated him with meals—when he did not take them next door, which Mrs. Bluxom thought it very absurd in him not to do all the time; and, on the whole, Mr. Neale was about as comfortable as it was possible for a young gentleman to be—and much more so than young gentlemen in love, when banished from their divinities, are apt to be. He had even got so far as to look upon his mother's forgetfulness of the keys as a most fortunate circumstance; for his burglarious entrance into Mr. Bluxom's house was, probably, the only entrance he could have made, as etiquette forebade their being conscious of each other's existence.

Those two weeks seemed shod with lightning; and one bright morning in September, the affectionate son and brother was paralyzed by the sight of three female traveling-dresses, with the owners therein; and six female trunks, three stories high, and bearing the appearance of having been danced on at that, to get them closed.

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed all three, kissing him ecstatically, "we should have stayed a week longer, had it not been for you—how lonely you must have been!"

Stuart modestly insinuated that it was too great a sacrifice to hurry home for him; and that, on the whole, he had "done pretty well."

"But you must have been entirely without society," said Miss Fanny; "not a creature is in town yet."

Her brother wished to inform her that there were two or three creatures next door; but they scarcely gave him a chance. That story would have to lie over until they had relieved themselves of the burden of news that had accumulated during his departure.

"What do you think, Stuart, has become of Violet Withers?" asked his younger sister, somewhat mischievously. "That 'dear, little, unsophisticated piece of nature,' as I believe you called her?"

"Ran away with Dewsbury, perhaps," he replied, with a composure that struck his anxious relatives as an admirable piece of acting.

"A very artful little girl," said Mrs. Neale, with a disapproving shake of her head.

"What has 'become of her?'" asked Stuart.

"Engaged to old Greenback!" replied Miss Fanny, triumphantly. "Mrs. Clarkly had been angling after him ever since his arrival."

"Why, he's deaf, and has grandchildren!" exclaimed her astonished brother.

"Likewise, deeds and mortgages without number," said Mrs. Neale, smiling; "and Miss Violet's engagement-ring might rouse the envy of a prince of Oude."

"I really think," said Stuart, gravely, "that it would have been more respectable to have taken Dewsbury."

"Therein consists the difference between you," laughed his sister Fanny. "Miss Violet did not think so; for poor Dewsbury was overheard laying his heart at her feet just before old Greenback committed himself. Oh! we've had gay doings, I can assure you!"

"And what have you been doing, my dear boy?" asked his mother, caressingly.

"Turning burglar," replied Stuart, laughing at the recollection of his adventure, "and breaking into our next door neighbors' house—all owing to my dear mother's carefully locking me out of every room in our own."

The three were quite dumb with astonishment as they listened to the recital; and Mrs. Neale scarcely knew what to think of it.

"You cannot tell how kind they have been, mother," added her son; "nor how much I have enjoyed their society ever since—they were a cluster of living palms in the desert. I have promised a call from you and my sisters at an early day. Miss Bluxom is a very superior girl."

"I should like to know something about them," replied Mrs. Neale, with true city reserve.

"Do you not know that they have been kind to your son?" asked Stuart, reproachfully.

"Mother," said Fanny, suddenly, when her brother had left them, "I do not think that Stuart really cared for Violet Withers, after all!"

"I do not think he cares now," replied Mrs. Neale, thoughtfully. "I wonder what this Miss Bluxom is like? I am afraid he has

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gotten us, as well as himself, into a sort of scrape. We shall have to call, of course, and thank them for their kindness to Stuart."

They did call, and were fairly taken by storm. The frostiness of fashionable propriety was speedily dissolved by their kind reception; and there was such a catching warmth about the whole family, that it was impossible to make a ceremonious visit. Mrs. Bluxom and Mrs. Neale discovered that they had been school-mates; and "that sweet little Minnie" was pronounced perfectly irresistible.

Stuart very soon discovered that the home-powers were favorable to his wooing—much of which was done on a city balcony, without any "water-prospect" but that afforded by a neighboring hydrant. They had, however, the assistance of the luminary that, according to Hood,

"—— Makes earth's commonest scenes appear
All poetic, romantic, and tender;
Hanging with jewels a cabbage-stump,
And investing a common post, or a pump,
A currant-bush, or a gooseberry-clump,
With a halo of dream-like splendor."

When Mr. Bluxom was applied to for permission to do what had already been done, he said that he was afraid it would look like paying a premium on vice, to reward a man who had entered his house in such a questionable manner with his daughter's hand; but, nevertheless, he did it; and the act seemed to give general satisfaction to all concerned in it.

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THE ROMANCE OF A SUMMER DAY.
BY FRANCES LEE.
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THE ROMANCE OF A SUMMER DAY.

BY FRANCES LEE.

Two pretty girls, in gipsy hats and segar-colored suits, took seats in an excursion-train from Boston to Lowell, one bright day last summer. They had for escort a middle-aged gentleman, who had much rather have been in his counting-house, than pleasure-seeking. "But then," said he to himself, as he handed the smaller of the two to her seat, "cousin Mabel's visit to Boston shall not be a failure."

But what is one man's meat is another man's poison. Only five seats behind, sat a slender, brown-eyed youth, who looked at the reflection of the other of these fair, girlish faces, in the glass at the end of the car, and envied Waverly Westgate with his whole heart.

"Oh, Nelly! do look at the charming bunch of water-lilies that young man behind us is buying! What a shame he should take them all!" cried Mabel. "Do you think he heard me?" she added, in a guilty whisper, as a slackening of the car threw her voice out high and clear on the sudden stillness. "Oh, no! He has gone out," she continued, quite relieved as she cast a stealthy look over her shoulder.

Then Waverly stepped out also on the platform, and when he returned he brought with him the water-lilies, which he laid in Mabel's lap.

"How splendid! Where did you get them? Thank you over and ever so much," said Mabel, burying her face in the pure, sweet blossoms.

"You need not thank me. I did not buy them," returned her cousin.

Mabel looked puzzled; and just then her eye caught these words, written upon a petal of one of the lilies,

"From the truest to the fairest."

"Why, Nelly Natal, do see here!" she exclaimed.

Nelly looked at the peculiar backhanded characters, curiously at first, and then with a sudden flush and evident excitement. Apparently the trite sentiment brought some message to her, or touched some secret chord.

The puzzled surprise increased in Mabel's face; but before she could speak she was thrown violently against the seat before her, while the car swayed about like a boat on a stormy sea. Then came a sudden plunge, a horrible slipping out of consciousness, and the next Mabel knew she was lying on a grassy hill-slope, with the sound of a water-fall near, and a bird singing and tilting on the swaying bough of an elm-tree overhead.

Mabel raised herself on her elbow and looked about. The bird, startled at the motion, stopped her singing, and flew away; and then there was no sight or sound of anything living.

"I wonder if I am dead," thought she, "and in the next world all by myself! I didn't suppose there would be worms'-nests on the trees there, or thorns on the blackberry-vines," she continued, reflectively, looking more carefully around.

Then she grew giddy, and, shutting her eyes, sunk back again upon the grass. Presently she was conscious of a footfall, so light that she felt rather than heard it, and opening her eyes, looked straight into the brown eyes of a young man.

"I *am* dead," she decided; "and here is an angel."

The "angel" had no wings, but wore on his head a Panama hat, and taking it off, now began softly to fan her till, little by little, Mabel's scattered senses came back; the color returned to her cheeks, and she perceived herself to be still in the body. Then she recognized the young man as the fellow-traveler who had bought the lilies.

"What happened, and where are the rest?" said she.

As she spoke, an engine screamed in the distance, as if in answer, followed by the rattle of a train of cars. Mabel rose to her feet in quick excitement, and then she saw, far down the hill-slope, an upturned car and mass of debris, with people standing and lying among and around the fragments of the wreck.

"Is Nelly killed?" she asked, in an agony of impatience. "Where is cousin Waverly?"

"Nobody is killed, and I think nobody is seriously hurt. Miss Natal has a slightly sprained ancle, and Mr. Westgate has another, so they waited for you below," replied the young man. "Excuse me; you will walk more firmly if you take my arm."

Mabel was beginning to feel tremulous again, so, without standing upon the order of her going, she thanked him and took the stranger's arm.

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"I don't see why I am so weak. I am not hurt," said she. "And how came I away up the hill all alone?"

"I carried you there to have you out of the way of the confusion," replied the youth. "When I found you had only fainted I went back to look after the others."

He did not think it necessary to add that, deceived by the gipsy hat and segar-colored suit, he thought he had Mabel's cousin, Nelly, in his arms until far up the hill; and if it had been she, it was possible he might have felt it a duty to stay by her until she had entirely recovered from the faintness.

When they came down among the shattered fragments of the overturned car, among the confused groups of anxious and of suffering faces, Mabel's light touch upon the young man's arm became more and more heavy as the deathly sickness began to come over her again, and she was glad to turn away to a more sheltered spot beyond a little clump of barberry-bushes, where her cousins were seated, talking as cheerfully as though they were there merely for a picnic.

Then such a pretty pink color flickered up over Nelly's face, settling in her cheeks and burning them scarlet. But Mabel hardly noticed it, or the sudden conscious silence that fell over her; for Mabel herself, in the excitement of fright and sense of relief, put her head on her cousin Waverly's shoulder, and began to cry like a silly school-girl. So they all turned to soothing her; and presently the cars sent for the relief of the disabled train were ready.

"I hope you do not feel obliged, Dr. Farnsworth, to go back to the city on our account," said Waverly, as the young man, after arranging him and the young ladies as comfortably as possible, seated himself just behind. "We are greatly obliged for all your kind attention, but shall need no further care, and I insist you do not incommode yourself."

The young man bowed. "I hope you do not think I am so blind to the duties of my profession as to desert my patients half-way," he answered, smiling. "And, really, I have no especial business at Providence."

"Now that Nelly Natal is not going," he might have added in truth.

Waverly did not continue to "insist;" but was rather relieved that the doctor did, for the pain of his twisted anclo was all he cared to attend to, as the train rattled on with as many jolts and bounces as it is possible for the ingenuity of a Yankee railroad to contrive.

"How young he looks for a doctor," whispered Mabel to Nelly. "Did you know him before? I think he is splendid-looking."

Nelly did not reply; but the pretty color dropped out of her cheeks, leaving them so white that Mabel was terrified.

"You are going to faint!" she cried.

And before Nelly could hinder her, the impulsive girl, who was herself about as reliable in an emergency as a paper doll, beckoned to the doctor, who sat watching them with rather more than professional interest. He instantly came forward.

"What is it?" he asked, with an air attentive enough in itself to insure success to any practitioner.

"Nothing, nothing at all. You are such a goose, Mabel!" answered Nelly, sharply, turning away her face.

Poor little Mabel looked helplessly from one to the other; but she was such a goose she did not see there was anything the matter but a railway accident.

"I thought you were surely going to faint you were so white, but you are red enough now. Aren't you dreadfully warm?" said she, innocently, pulling her fan from her pocket, instead of going to look after Waverly, and thus take herself out of the way.

The car rattled, and jolted, and bounced its way along, stopping whenever it was fairly under way, and starting off afresh each time with a desperate jerk and strain; for the engine nearest at hand, when the dispatch for help came, was nearly disabled, and it was not safe to put on much steam. So it wheezed and tugged like an overworked behemoth, and made riding more effort than walking.

"I can't bear this any longer. How is it with you, Nell?" said Waverly, at last.

As he spoke, the engine, as though also discouraged, gave a hopeless scream, and stopped outright.

"Thank you!" continued Waverly. "Now let us get out and wait for the express train. We can get somebody from one of these farmhouses to take us to the nearest station when it is time. That will not be for four hours yet; but I had rather sit on a log by the wayside than endure this any longer."

So they got out, and the philanthropic doctor with them.

"Why, no, don't let us trouble you any further," protested Waverly, seeing the train begin to vibrate preparatory to trying to start once more.

"I don't see why I am obliged to be jolted

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to death more than you," returned the doctor. "It seems to me the time in this strawberry-field, under these elms, will pass much more pleasantly."

Doubtless. Only the season for strawberries was gone a month; and *in* their season none grew within miles of that field; and the elms were shrub-oaks.

But the sun shone; the birds flitted through the clear air; squirrels scolded and chattered, swinging themselves from branch to branch; locusts, hidden among the green leaves, trilled in the drowsy noontide; roosters in neighboring farm-house answered each other with shrill cries.

"And a hundred happy insects
Sung in the warm repose."

Very near the railroad-track was a great, irregular rock, broken, yet smooth, and so surrounding the rough bole of a low-branched oak, with its grooves and hollows, as to make several natural seats with backs of living-oak. These rustic seats were soon made into luxurious couches and easy-chairs by buffalo-skins that Dr. Farnsworth borrowed at the nearest farm-house. He also brought from there milk, and bread, and berries, hard-boiled eggs, dough-nuts, and sweet-fern beer; with "butter and honey in a lordly dish," namely, a cabbage-leaf, wrapped about to keep them cool. Then, oh! the scented, sunny summer day, with a quiver of bird-songs in the air, of fluttering leaves upon the tree-tops, and brown crickets holding cheerful monologues among the meadow-grass.

"Them city folks appear to be enjoying themselves out there under the trees. I gave them an invite to come and sit in the front room, but there ne'er a one of them won't do it," remarked the farmer, coming for a dipper of water to pour over the grindstone.

"I wouldn't come in if I were they. I wish I had nothing to do but to sit under the trees this warm day and enjoy myself," sighed the farmer's wife, with a weary look at the ironing-table and basket of folded clothes, and then at the picturesque group, happy and careless in their "elegant leisure."

Happy and careless! So they looked, but every heart knoweth its bitterness.

Waverly Westgate, to be sure, lying along the rock with his hat-brim over his eyes, and the mingling of soft harmonies in his ears, was in that delicious state when he hardly knew if he were "man or rose." And Mabel was always light of heart and head as the small, green grasshoppers jumping and trilling in the new-mown hay. But there was something discordant somewhere between the blue and the green, for the summer meadow stretched out dreary as a deserted grave-yard before Nelly's eyes, while the doctor's eyes followed hers with sad yearning as he sat a little apart.

The hours sped and vanished, till the farmer's boy was ready with the wagon to take them to the coming train. It was a ride of only three miles, but the jogging, slow-paced horse made it six in the early evening, with the dropping dew, the glancing fire-flies, and, presently, as they came to a bit of woodland, a full chorus of katydids.

Mabel screamed with delight, till the white-faced horse pricked up his ears and ran two steps in astonishment.

"'Katy did! Katy didn't?' What did Katy do? What didn't Katy do? Aren't they cute? I never heard them before, did you, Nelly?"

"No, never! Do stop the horse a minute, driver, and let us listen!" replied Nelly.

"Katy did? What did Katy?" repeated Mabel.

"I know," replied Dr. Farnsworth. "She did judge a friend with false judgment, and she didn't listen to his explanation."

Mabel laughed. "Do tell the story, if you know it," she said.

"Yes, I know it," replied Dr. Farnsworth, with a touch of dreariness in his tone.

"Katy had a lover; and she had promised to go with him to the grand concert by starlight in the maple-trees. All the day he thought of nothing else, but spent the time polishing his wings, and eating honey-dew to make his voice clear. However, on his way to her bower he heard a pitiful moaning in the grass, and turning aside, found a little black cricket, which had had its leg stepped on and broken by a rabbit flying past. He could not leave the poor creature, and by the time he had bound up the broken leg with plantain-leaves and grass, it was too late for the concert. And never from that night to this has Katy listened to his apology. Do you not think she should, Miss Natal?" asked Dr. Farnsworth, suddenly turning to Nelly.

"The story is not true," replied Nelly, hoarsely. "There was no broken-legged cricket, but a gay fire-fly—and the false lover danced with her."

"Never!" cried Dr. Farnsworth, earnestly. "It was surely a wounded cricket; or, to speak literally, a bricklayer, crushed b a falling building."

"Weren't you walking on the Common with

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Julia Beidler, in the moonlight? My sister, Mary, saw you," answered Nelly, unconsciously dropping the slender thread of parable, and betraying herself.

"Never!" repeated the doctor, vehemently. "I was caring for the poor bricklayer, who died at midnight. But, very likely, your sister might have seen my twin-brother, Gersham, with Julia Beidler. He usually is."

At these few words, which seemed so simple, and meant so little to a stranger, something hard, and cold, and heavy, instantly dropped out of Nelly's heart, and left in its place a singing, winged bird; and, like Moses, she veiled her face to hide its shining. Was this, indeed, the world that looked so gray and gloomy a moment ago? Why this was Paradise, full of flowers, and birds, and sunshine; a spot where

> "From the boundless green below,
> To the fathomless blue above,
> The creatures of God are happy
> In the warmth of their Summer love."

And the affection that had been developing so shyly, so slowly, as though it had the life of a century-plant for its perfecting, burst into sudden bloom, like the flowers of an Arctic summer.

But Mable, too much bewildered to know what to say, looked from one to the other in curious wonder.

"What is it, Nell?" she cried, presently, for she was not a girl to long lose her voice. "Were you the Katy who did, and who didn't?"

Nelly did not answer. She did not even hear. For the time, she and Dr. Farnsworth were alone in the universe. And the swinging branches, the fading daylight, the insect harmony, the jog of the plodding horse, the touch of the summer air on her forehead, and the merry babble of Mabel's voice, only made up a rosy background behind these two souls. Then orange-flowers budded, and burst in blossoms on every wayside weed; each farm-house turned into a palace of jasper, and the backbone fences around pastures that bore two rocks to every blade of grass, were built of pearl, and inclosed glimpses of the lost Eden.

Such delusion! As Waverly Westgate could have told her! He knew perfectly well he was riding over a dusty country-road, passing houses whose inhabitants had gradually withdrawn into one end, which they patched with shingles and clap-boards from the other. He knew he was riding in a wagon without springs; that the falling dew was chill and heavy, and that, if the white-nosed horse did not mend his pace, they should fall behind the train, already whistling in the far distance. Just in time! The old farm-wagon drew up with an extra bounce and jolt on one side of the station, as the express, with a fussy snort, halted an instant at the other—and in another moment they were on their homeward way.

"Always remember, Mabel, whatever happens," said Nelly, sagely, with experienced wisdom, after they had gone up stairs that night, "to listen to explanations, even if you *know* you know. Now here are six whole months wasted, and even if Charley and I spend eternity together, we can never get them back."

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HOME AFTER ALL THOSE YEARS.
BY FRANK LEE BENEDICT.
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HOME AFTER ALL THOSE YEARS.

BY FRANK LEE BENEDICT.

She was at home, actually standing in the old familiar library; Maud's arm was about her neck, and Elinor was kneeling on the floor, and already making friends with the little girl. The boy, more shy, or else with a precocious want of confidence in feminine nature, was peering at the new aunt from behind the shelter of his mother's dress, clinging fast with one hand to his cap, as if to be ready for flight at a second's notice; while little Nell had dashed her turban on the carpet, and twice stepped on it with her usual heedlessness.

There Miriam Peyton stood, for the first moments so overpowered by the meeting, that she could only hold fast to Maud in speechless excitement, while the room swam before her tired eyes, as the cabin of the ship had so often done during her long voyage.

Everything was so natural, and yet so changed. Even the girls' faces and appearance were so new, and still so familiar, from the old-time likeness, that clung about them. Seven years ago, Maud had been seventeen, and stately Elinor, a wild, frolicsome girl, two years younger; and now they greeted her as matured women, able to understand and sympathize with the sorrows that had fallen upon her.

The sisters had met her in the hall, when the sound of carriage-wheels announced her arrival, and seizing upon the group had hurried her thither. For many moments the scene was like a picture of still life, in spite of the agitation all three felt; for even Maud's tearful greetings were uttered in whispers, and Elinor's attempts at friendship with the little girl were made in gestures, while she waited for her choked voice to come back.

Presently there was a sound of an opening door, unnoticed by Miriam; but Maud turned her gently round, and she found herself standing face to face with Walter Ainslie. Cousin Walter he had been to her, in the old times, though the relationship was so far removed, that nothing but close intercourse from childhood would have made that familiar name habitual in the household.

Something more he had been to Miriam, personally, in the vanished days. He had been her patient, devoted lover, though in her girlish vanity and pride she had thought more lightly of the offering, than a good woman ever should of a man's affection, however impossible it may be for her to return it.

There he stood now, and added to the mingled strangeness and familiarity of the scene. He was so changed; and yet it was the same kind, manly face; worn, lined, almost middle-aged looking, till the smile, that Miriam remembered so well, softened his mouth, and brightened the honest, blue eyes into positive beauty.

"Walter!" she exclaimed; "dear, old Walter!" involuntarily calling him, as she had done in the vanished time.

He came forward and took her hands, saying pleasant words of welcome, outwardly less moved by the meeting than she; for Miriam would never lose her excitability and impulsiveness, if she lived to be a hundred, and struggled through blacker sorrows than those which had darkened the past seven years.

Then the girls darted upon her again, with incoherent exclamations, and that mingling of smiles and tears which is very pretty to witness, if not carried too far. At last the children became so much excited by the tumult, that they flew at their mother also, impressed with the idea that something terrible had happened; and Miriam regained her own composure in trying to restore theirs.

By the time that happy consummation was reached, wise Elinor remembered that they had all done the pathetic as much as Miriam's nerves could well stand, and she began to laugh and talk nonsense, and frowned secretly at Walter for showing so plainly in his tell-tale face the pain he felt at Miriam's altered appearance. Not that she had lost her beauty, but those seven weary years had taken the warmth and girlishness away; and Walter could have cursed the man whose acts had made the years so heavy, only Morgan Peyton was dead.

"Come," Elinor urged, "now we will go in a grand procession, and show Miriam her rooms. Maud, call the nurse; or no, I'll take care of the twin birds myself."

So they all went to survey the pretty nest, on which the sisters and Walter had bestowed such pains; and Elinor said,

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"We choose these rooms, Miriam, because they have the winter sun."

Miriam smiled; but she knew that the girls had not given her old apartments to her, lest she should be saddened by the recollection they must rouse. She was right as to the reason of the change; but the thought was Walter's, only nobody ever told her so.

At last, the two sisters and Walter went down stairs. Nurse took away the two children, voluble and wide-eyed with questions and sage remarks concerning their aunts, and all the varied wonders of this new place. Miriam was left in solitude. She was left alone, for the express purpose of lying down to rest, and had been commanded so to do by every one of her visitors, from the sisters to the children, and she really thought she meant to obey. She exchanged her traveling attire for a loose dressing-gown, that had been got out of the already opened boxes, and was on her way toward the bed, when she caught sight of her own face in the glass, and before she knew it, she had seated herself by the table, had leaned her elbows on it to support her head with her hands, and sat gazing intently at her image, remembering with sudden distinctness the girlish face that used to look out at her from the mirrors in the old house, and feeling as if the pale, tired features which confronted her now must be those of a stranger. Presently she forgot the phantom of the girl's face, with its joyous smiles. She forgot the tired countenance, and the melancholy eyes that stared at her from the mirror, with a languid surprise. Her thoughts had drifted back to the day she left that house, seven years before, and dwelt with cruel persistence upon all that spread between her and that season. Every detail of those miserable years came up; and though she had, months before, tried to shut the door between her soul and the past, had prayed to forget, for her own soul's sake and that of the dead, she was powerless in these first hours of her return to check the weary tide of reflection.

She had gone away a bride, after less than a year's acquaintance with Morgan Peyton. She had married him, dazzled by the brilliancy of that first dream, which young people call love, but which, nine times out of ten, is a sentiment, that can no more endure wear and tear, than hot-house plants can bear the chill winds of the north.

Miriam did not remember her father. Her mother had died when she was sixteen. Aunt Ainslie lived with her and the younger girls, (she still resided in the house, but was absent now,) and at Miriam's request they had gone to New York for awhile. There she met Peyton, and during the next summer he followed her out to her country home, and the pair were married.

The wedding was hurried on, because Peyton was obliged to go to India. He had an old English uncle there, whose heir he was to be; and the uncle talked of dying, and wanted his nephew. But old Peyton lived long enough to learn more of Morgan's character, and thanks to his common sense, Miriam and her children were not to-day penniless. Her own fortune, girl like, she thought it sublime not to have secured to herself, and every trace of it had vanished.

Miriam Peyton had lived seven frightful years. Before she reached Calcutta, her dream had been so coarsely dispelled, that, in the madness of youth and inexperience, she prayed wildly to heaven that the ship might go down, down, and she never catch sight of land.

I could make a harsh sensation story, but I think such writing can do no good to any human being: it is enough that she knew her dream was killed beyond the possibility of revival, though as yet the agony and the insanity remained. In less than a year the twins were born. They were healthy and strong—so Miriam knew why she had to live. Months and years passed. She had gone so far beyond the power of jealousy, that her husband's presence was only a dread and loathing to her; but after the uncle died, she found that there were depths of suffering and ignominy that she had not before sounded.

Most men, given to wrong courses, have some besetting sin and many good qualities. But Morgan Peyton was a man-tiger—I can think of no other comparison for him. He had a positive genius for cruelty. Often his behavior was so like insanity, that Miriam used to wonder if he were mad. The Bible tells us of unfortunates who were possessed by devils. I think a legion haunted and ruled Morgan Peyton; and the worst sins of ordinary men were his mildest failings.

This sounds exaggerated, but I am wording my description as mildly as I can, and I am writing the exact truth. But Miriam lived. She could not die because of the children. But why God compelled her and them to stay seemed to her a mystery so cruel, that often she doubted whether there were any more mercy in heaven than she found on earth. There was a season, when she was so rebel

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lious, that she could have followed the advice the woman of old offered, could have cursed God, and died. There were times of horrible apathy, when, sunk in black thoughts, she was ready to believe, that, for some unknown sin of those gone before, she was under a ban, here and hereafter. There was the dreadful sound of anguish, remorse, rebellion, which no words could make clear to you, unless observation or experience has unfolded to your knowledge the whole extent of human misery.

Freedom came at last, without warning. Morgan Peyton had been absent from Calcutta for several weeks, when news reached Miriam of his death. He had been killed in a drunken brawl. Everything connected with him was in God's hands now. She had no right to remember his errors harshly. She tried to forgive. She wrote to the girls at home, and prepared to return to America. She had never complained to any human being. As her sisters grew up, and wrote enthusiastically of her happiness, she felt that she could not bear it; but all she did was to request them never to ask questions about her life.. They knew she suffered. Walter, too, knew the whole story from a friend. But there were no confidences.

It was all over now. She was safe in her old home! Some sudden noise from below roused her from the trance of memory, and she recalled her strength and courage by that thought.

She dressed herself and went down stairs, stopping in the children's room, on the way, where she found them tumultuous over bread and marmalade, and loud in praises of aunt Elinor, who had been in to inform them that they should be sent for when dessert was on the table.

It was growing dusk, for the autumn days had begun to shorten, as Miriam entered the library. It had always been the family habit to assemble there before dinner. Aunt Ainslie had now returned from town, and was there to greet Miriam, not in the least changed by these seven long years. Miriam had left her a commonplace nonentity, and found her the same. Aunt Ainslie kissed her niece; hoped her journey was pleasant, as if it had been a little trip of fifty miles; then began to relate a wonderful coincidence, which was none at all; then to lament that she had lost three skeins of embroidery-silk; then fell into a doze, which lasted till dinner was announced. She was a worthy soul, but more like a fat pillow, physically and mentally, than anything else.

The evening passed pleasantly enough. The children were a great resource, because people who have been long separated always find it hard work to talk at first. So the youthful pair were kept up, long after they ought to have been in bed; and nurse scolded her familiar, the tea-pot, in consequence. Nurse was always drinking tea, and made all her confidences to the tea-pot. It was noticeable that very soon her tea-pots got an astonished, wide-awake look, as if the effect of all the marvelous revelations she made to them.

Cousin Walter lived at his own house. The grounds adjoined Beechmore, so, at bed-time, he took his leave, and the sisters departed to their rooms. Miriam was dreary enough. But she laid her head on her pillow with a feeling of rest and security, to which she had long been a stranger. She was safe! No more fear of waking to find a madman standing over her with a loaded pistol in his hand. No more danger of being roused by a noise of some one trying to break into the house to steal her children. Once these had been almost nightly incidents in her life.

The night passed. Miriam woke from a restful sleep, and the first day of this new life began. It was a very quiet, peaceful existence. For months and months there would be nothing to chronicle. The girls had their little amusements and interests; visits to town; guests in the house; admirers and pretty romances; but Miriam lived very quietly, and gradually, to her surprise, found that she was resting herself into strength.

Spring came, and summer. The children throve. Serious Maud married a young clergyman, and departed to her new home. Elinor was soon to follow her example, though her lover was a naval-officer, and her destination, for the first years, was a pleasant Italian city on the Mediterranean.

The weeks slipped on. Maud and her husband came back to the old house for a short visit; and the morning they went away Elinor was married. Miriam and her aunt were left alone in the homestead. Elinor had pleaded hard for her sister to accompany her to Europe, promising all sorts of gayeties and pleasantness; but it was precisely such alluring inducements that made Miriam stoutly refuse to comply. She preferred the quiet of the old house, broken only by the merry voices of her children, the entire seclusion, even the companionship of aunt Ainslie, who had a certain number of stereotyped remarks for each day, and never varied from, or went beyond the number. The thought of going out into the great world was abhorrent to the weary woman:

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she had neither part nor lot therein. She could not bring herself to sit by, in the crowd, and watch other people, like a sad ghost, who had no feeling in common with mortality, save that of pain.

A year had gone by since her return home, and she had, at least, found peace, or if not that, a repose which she called such, and which was very welcome after the tumult and storms of the past, lonely as she often found herself. She wondered, sometimes, that her children did not completely fill up her life, as was the case with so many other women. She loved them passionately. There was not a sport that she did not share with them, not a childish pain but she felt as acutely as if it had been some trouble to herself; but all that absorbing affection brought no completeness into her existence; and she reproached herself bitterly therefor. She had nothing else to look forward to. No fresh hope could ever come near her. Her life was dead, save as she lived through those tiny beings. Frequently she chafed under that knowledge, and the old, bitter cry rose in her soul, that God was cruel—he treated her more harshly than he did others! Then the spasm of restlessness would be followed by seasons of acute remorse, and she would wear the night out in supplications for forgiveness of her own ingratitude. She had prayed for deliverance in the darkness of her trouble; and now that it had come she was not content, and her thanklessness seemed to her an unpardonable sin.

But the girls were married and gone, and Miriam was mistress in the old house, which was haunted by so many memories, that each room seemed filled with the phantoms that had been living presences or hopes in her girlhood.

She returned few visits, and, of course, guests became rare at the house, for aunt Ainslie was eminently unsocial, too. Cousin Walter was a daily visitor, and his interest and kindness never flagged. He persuaded Miriam out, to ride and walk, in the beautiful autumn days. He devised amusements for the children. He bought new books, persuaded Miriam to arouse her old talent and love for painting, and in every way possible brought sunshine and occupation into her melancholy days.

So the glorious October faded. The leaves fell from the trees, the soft November haze gathered over the landscape, and the entrancing beauty of Indian Summer glowed in earth and sky.

One lovely day Walter appeared at the house, and tempted the little party off upon an expedition among the hills. Between him and the children, Miriam was so taken out of herself, that the lovely afternoon faded like a dream. He went home with them to dine, and as aunt Ainslie, by some dispensation of a merciful Providence, was smitten with toothache, and forced to go to bed, the cousins had dinner to themselves.

The children came down for awhile in the evening, and Walter romped with them to their hearts' content, until nurse swooped down, like a ferocious eagle on a pair of helpless lambs, and carried them off to her eyrie. But little Maud did try to be rebellious, and would only consent to depart on condition that Walter conveyed her up stairs, pic-a-back, which he willingly did, crooning an old nursery melody as he went, which made Miriam smile, as the tenor notes floated softly down into the drawing-room.

Presently Walter returned and found her standing by her harp. She was looking so much better than usual, to-night, that, seeing her in that attitude, it struck him, with a momentary pang, for she was so like the idol of his youthful dream. She had thrown off her widow's weeds, at the time of Maud's marriage, though out-of-doors she still dressed in sufficiently sombre garb. But to-night she had put on a white dress of some soft woolen fabric, that was lighted up by violet ribbons, and the fatigue of the day had brought a slight pink into her cheeks. For the first time, since her return, she was like the Miriam of other days.

"I am going to reward you for being a bad, old boy, and spoiling my children," she said. "I have been secretly trying to get back a little of my skill, and now you shall hear what the harp will say."

He sat down, without a word; and she played: and after that they sang together; then they had tea; and finally, they drifted off into a conversation more confidential than they had before held. Miriam told Walter freely of her loneliness, and of her remorse at her own discontent. The strong man's heart was moved to the core. He could not have told how it came about; but he found himself saying, with an odd quiet,

"Miriam, I may as well tell you the truth. I love you, more deeply even than in the old days. Come to me, if you can. I can help you to make more of your life. It is not possible for you to find entire peace as you live now. I would try to make you happy——"

"Oh! Walter, Walter!" she broke in.

"Couldn't you do it? Do I pain you?" he

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asked. "Then think no more of it. I only gave way to a little insanity—just forget it."

Miriam sat looking at him, in a trouble which made it difficult for her to speak. A sudden revelation had come to her. She comprehended the desolation and unrest of the past weeks. She discovered that she loved this man at last.

"Don't look so, Miriam," she heard him saying. "What an ass I was to worry you! See, I'll go straight home, by way of penance, and you shall forget my idiocy."

He rose to go. She stretched out her hands with one eager sob, calling,

"Walter, Walter!"

He made a step toward her, his face fairly convulsed with contending emotions.

"You don't mean—you couldn't——"

"Walter!" she called again, "Walter!"

He was at her feet, holding her hands fast, saying brokenly,

"Could you marry me, Miriam? Could——"

"I can love you," she whispered, leaning her head on his hands. "Forgive me—I never knew it till now."

There are crises, in this life, for which there is no earthly comparison. Walter Ainslie knew, in that bewildering moment, how the freed soul feels when the last earthly mists are left behind, and when the glorious vision of the eternal shore opens upon its dazzled sight.

He held her fast in his arms, and for a time not a word was spoken. But they thought they were talking all the while.

Look you, there are matters too sacred to write about; too holy to speak of, save to the few, whom we know have learned what the purest and highest type of love is. I leave them here. Only let us thank God, that he has left on earth the capability of such bliss; and be still.

The next morning Walter was early at the house, and there was a long talk, broken by many episodes, but at least a few important points were settled upon. They were to be married in the spring. Outwardly there was to be no change in their lives until then—not even a word was to be written to the girls.

The winter passed on into spring. The close of the last day that their secret must be kept had come. In the morning Walter was to tell the story to aunt Ainslie. In a week they were to be married. Walter was obliged to leave early, for his business agent was at his house. Miriam sat in the library, where he had left her. The windows that opened on the veranda had the shutters ajar, to admit the moonlight, that played like a silver mist about the room. Miriam sat down at the table and began to write to Maud. A sudden noise roused her, as of a hand tapping impatiently at the glass. Her first thought was that Walter had come back to steal a parting look at her. She started up, and ran toward the window, and confronted her husband, or his spirit.

She could neither swoon, nor cry out. If she had a definite thought, it was that his ghost had been permitted to come back and torment her. It was only an instant's delusion.

His hand tapped again on the glass. She heard his voice,

"Open—I want to come in."

Mechanically she flung the casement ajar. Peyton stepped into the room, closed the window, and stood regarding her with the old mocking smile.

"Are you a living man? What are you?" she gasped.

"Your husband, my dear," said he, "fresh from the grave. Come to do a new version of Orlando, the brave, and the false Imogen."

Miriam tottered back into a chair, and sat staring at him.

"Now listen," said he. "I know everything. I have been watching you for weeks. I have been in this house twenty times. I did think to steal the brats would hurt you worst; but I believe stopping the second marriage is best, though I was uncertain if it wouldn't be pleasanter to wait and have you tried for bigamy."

She did not move or speak. Hell had opened and closed upon her once more.

"It's a pretty clear case," he went on, "and I have brought two witnesses. You sailed from India under the care of Col. Watson; that is, you ran off with him. He left you in England, (by-the-way he's dead,) and you came here dressed in widow's weeds. You thought I could not trace you. That's the story for the world. Don't you think any court will give me the children?"

She sprang to her feet.

"I'll kill them first, with these hands," she said, in an awful whisper.

"That's motherly love," sneered he. "I've read of it in books, beautiful Medea!"

She sat down again. She could reflect enough to know that insanity was very near.

"Now I don't want the animals," said he. "I am penniless, and I want money——"

"You shall have it," she broke in. "Sign a paper that shall be a legal separation, and I'll give you all mine and theirs."

He laughed outright.

"I thought you didn't believe in a divorced

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woman marrying," said he. "No, I want you, too. Upon my soul, I have missed having you to torment. Go away with me, and it's all right. If you don't, I'll bring the matter into the courts. I'll take the children, and make them infamous through you. Come, take ten minutes to decide—not a second longer. You go with me, or suffer the consequences."

"The children?" she gasped.

"You shan't take them. Leave them here with the old woman."

She heard his voice again.

"Time's up! Do you go, or stay?"

She stood still and looked at him.

"I will go," she said. "Let me tell my aunt."

"Not a word," he answered. "Here's a cloak and hood. We'll walk to the village, and take the midnight train for New York. Your jewels are all there at the banker's, and to-morrow you'll have the stocks and English property made over to me."

He threw the cloak about her. He had hold of her arm, when the door opened, and Walter entered. He had come back, haunted by a presentiment. He recognized Peyton, at the first glance, and comprehended, in a measure, what had happened. He darted forward, with some wild thought of murdering him on the instant; but Miriam stepped between them. The sight of Walter brought her reason back.

"Stand still," she said. "He was not dead. He can make it appear that I ran away. I am going with him. Take care of my children."

"Not to-night!" cried Walter.

"This instant!" exclaimed Peyton.

Miriam put her two hands on Walter's arm.

"I must do it," she said, "for the children, Walter. Oh, let me! You and I are parted any way—let me go! You can't spare me. If we had a trial, either way it ended my children would be disgraced. Walter, I must go."

There were mad expostulations from Ainslie; bitter merriment from Peyton; but Miriam held firm to her purpose.

"Good-by, Walter. In the next world we shall know why. I shall ask you for my children there. I shall ask you for your love—God will let me have both."

Walter stood paralyzed. Her clasp upon his arm relaxed. She turned toward her husband.

"I am ready," she said: and in a breath they were out of the room.

This, that I have written you, is absolute truth. But you will not believe it. People never believe the truth.

For five years Walter Ainslie had his aunt and the children in his house; and during that whole time no news ever came from Miriam. The children grew toward maturity. Aunt Ainslie faded and died. Walter was a gray-haired man, but there was no change, no break.

Miriam allowed her husband to take her away to Europe. Her fortune was large, but he squandered it long before those years were at an end. He dragged her through every species of shame and abasement; but she lived; and never once did her faith in God falter! It was mercifully granted in her misery, the fullness of trust that never before would come.

It was the fifth anniversary of that terrible parting. Walter Ainslie sat alone, in his room, at early dusk. You know where his thoughts were. There was a sudden commotion below stairs. But he did not hear it. There was a step outside. The door opened, and, through the gloom, he heard Miriam's voice,

"Walter, God has let me come back!"

He had! Morgan Peyton was, indeed, dead at last. It was vouchsafed him, that the devils were exorcised before his soul went forth. I cannot tell why, any more than I can tell you why his innocent victims were allowed to suffer at his hands, but I do know that God cannot err! You shall have faith, but not reason. Maybe, somewhere, in eternity, the explanation of such mysteries shall come also.

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